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*Amateur*

20 February 2016

# Gardening

**Top 18**  
**bare**  
**roots**  
**to plant out now**

*this week*  
**STARTING  
DAHLIAS  
INTO  
GROWTH**

See p12



**Perfect primroses**

What to do for the very best flowers



**Summer  
bulb tips**

How to plant in  
pots and borders

**On the  
veg plot**

Prune apples, sow  
peas, force rhubarb



Grow the tastiest  
**tomatoes**

- Sow annual climbers
- How to help wildlife
- Plant a fig tree

**Bare root  
beauties**

The best flower varieties  
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# This week in <sup>Amateur</sup>Gardening

20 February 2016



**46** Grow tomatoes



**26** Plant a hedge



**56** Feed wildlife



**6** Plant summer bulbs



## Tim Rumball's Editors letter

**A** COUPLE of weeks ago I told you about the black mondo grass growing in our main front garden bed. There's lots of it, but it looks good and is slow growing so I'm happy to accommodate it.

However there are other botanical residents – apart from weeds – that love the conditions and aren't so welcome because they're a little too vigorous. Off the top of my head, muscari or grape hyacinths are as bad as bluebells and forever banned from my free draining soil where they rattle like tiny Triflids; and aquilegas that self-seed prolifically, blanketing the beds if they're not weeded out fastidiously.

I now have another contender, planted in the deep shade beneath our substantial camellia where (surprisingly) it's been

growing strongly for a couple of years. It blooms beautifully through January and February – and often later in the year too. The pretty pink whorl shaped flowers of the lesser periwinkle, *Vinca minor* sparkle while the glossy green foliage brings rich colour to otherwise dull, bare earth.

But the mother plant is beginning to look a little too healthy in my rich, deep sandy soil, and baby plantlets pop up throughout the bed at random. *Vinca* is stoloniferous, propagating its self from low branches or surface runners (like strawberries), but because the babies appear widely spread I'm beginning to wonder if it's self-seeding, or suckering from roots, too. If that proves to be the case it will have to go.

Have a great gardening week.

### Get in touch!

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# Your Gardening Week



with AG's gardening expert Ruth Hayes



Time Inc. (Gerald Shatterson)

Sowing tomatoes is a sure sign that better weather is on the way!

## Time to sow toms

Tomatoes are relatively easy to grow, and can produce a bountiful crop. **Ruth** suggests two ways of sowing yours

**T**OMATOES are so popular that even non-gardeners like to have a go at growing them! Just a couple of plants will reward you with plenty of delicious summer fruits for salads, sandwiches or as ingredients in cooking.

There are all kinds of tomatoes to try, from the tiniest cherry types, through to full-flavoured, giant beefsteak varieties. They can come in all kinds of colours, too.

Sowing can take place from February through to April. Late winter is the time for starting crops in an unheated



Home grown tomatoes taste wonderful

glasshouse, while you can sow in spring for outdoor crops. Depending on the sowing date, the on-going temperatures and the variety, harvesting can be as early as June under glass, and as late as the first frosts outdoors.

Tomatoes are easy to grow from seed – so don't get carried away! Usually only a few plants are needed, and germination is almost always good. If you are unable to sow seeds as you can't maintain the right conditions for germination, don't worry: just buy tomato plants in spring from garden centres.

Step by step

### Sow toms in a tray

Sow tomatoes in the warm now for early crops in a greenhouse



**1** Fill your seed tray with a good, damp seed or multipurpose compost. Level and firm the compost, then water using a can fitted with a fine rose end.



**2** Sow seeds on the compost surface, spacing them evenly, about a finger-width apart. Giving them space helps to prevent damping off disease.



**3** Cover the seed with a thin layer of compost, vermiculite, or a mix of both. Label the tray then cover with a clear plastic lid or clear plastic bag.



**4** Place the tray in a heated propagator at 21°C (70°F) or on a sunny windowsill indoors. Seedlings will show through in 5-10 days.



**Easy peeling:** Slice a shallow 'X' in the base of a tomato, and drop it in a pan of boiling water for 45–60 seconds. Transfer to a pan of iced water for a similar time, and the skin comes away cleanly.



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Prick out your seedlings into a larger pot

TimeInc. unless credited



Pinching out sideshoots concentrates fruits on one stem

## Training habits

■ **Vine/cordon:** One central stem is supported by a cane or string. Pinch out the sideshoots that appear between the leaf and main stem. Tomatoes that grow in this way are also known as 'indeterminate'.

■ **Bush:** These tomatoes produce compact plants with many short sideshoots that end in a cluster of flowers; these are 'determinate' tomatoes. Tie the plants loosely to a 3ft (1m) cane. Don't remove sideshoots as this will reduce cropping.

■ **Beefsteak tomatoes:** These produce vigorous side branches that often end in a flowering truss. Remove these only if the growth is unruly.

## Looking after tomato seedlings

**A**FTER germination, tomato seedlings should be placed in the best-possible light (still warm in the greenhouse or under cover) to prevent them becoming long, thin and 'leggy'. Tall, leggy specimens produce their first flowers high up on the plant, leading to bare, non-productive lower stems.

The ideal temperature should be around

18°C (65°F). After about two weeks, the seedlings should be large enough to prick out into separate pots of multipurpose compost. Hold seedlings by their seed leaves, to avoid damage to the delicate stems. After pricking out, water with tepid tap-water. Then, when the young plants reach 6in (15cm) high, place them in a slightly cooler temperature of 16°C (60°F).

### Step by step



## Using a Gro-Sure Sow Smart kit

The plants will grow on happily in their Gro-Sure compost pods, and can be planted in their final growing position when seedlings are 4–5in (10–15cm) tall.



**1** This kit is so easy to use! Remove the clear plastic lid, turn it over and fill it with water.



**3** Once the plugs have absorbed the water, remove the plastic stickers that are protecting the seeds underneath.



**2** Then carefully place the tray, including the compost plugs (still with their plastic toppings), into the water.



**4** Pour away any excess water, and put the lid back on. Place on a warm, bright windowsill, out of strong sunlight.



# Your Gardening Week



with AG's gardening expert Ruth Hayes

Step by step

## Planting bulbs in a container

Bulbs look great in pots, especially showy lilies and agapanthus



Mix grit with container compost to improve drainage

ALLTIMES unless credited

# Planting bulbs for summer colour

**Ruth** recommends getting summer and autumn-flowering bulbs in now for months of interest and colour

**A**NNUALS and herbaceous perennials are fabulous for brightening the garden, but for simple, space-filling brilliance, you're onto a winner with bulbs.

Plant summer and autumn-flowering varieties now, as the soil is starting to warm up, and they will reward you with structure and colour throughout your borders and in patio pots.

From velvety Anemone de Caen, which flowers in profusion in June and July (earlier if planted last autumn), through the summer's profusion of agapanthus, lilies,

bearded iris and gladioli, to the autumn brightness of lily-pink nerines, there truly is a bulb to bring colour from early summer to late autumn.

They are widely available in garden centres and online now, and should be planted as soon as possible after purchase to avoid drying out.

They may flower poorly after lengthy storage.

If you are planting in borders, position bulbs in clumps of at least six to get the most impressive displays.

It is also worth wearing gloves when handling bulbs and corms, as they can cause skin irritation.



Velvety anemones will happily spread over the years



**1** Place crocks at the base of the pot. For one season, use multi-purpose compost and grit. For longer-term planting, use John Innes No 3 instead.



**2** Plant the bulbs with their shoot-producing 'nose' upwards, at three times their own depth, and one bulb's width apart.



**3** Cover the bulbs with the remaining compost, leaving around an inch (2.5cm) at the top for watering. Lightly firm the compost.



**4** Water well to help settle the bulbs, and place the pot on feet to boost drainage. Give the plants a liquid feed when the first shoots start to show.



**Lily danger:** Lily pollen is toxic to cats, so if you have a mog or two, you may want to buy widely available pollen-free varieties.



## Create easy colour with these bulbs

Six favourites for a bright garden through the seasons



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**1 Agapanthus:** Also known as African lily, with heads of brilliant blue or white flowers, these perennials like full sun.



**2 Nerine bowdenii:** Unusually these are planted on the soil surface, for a brilliant splash of pink in the autumn.



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**3 Oriental lilies:** The stars of the show, they flourish in containers, and can be transferred to a border after flowering.



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**4 Crocosmia:** These scarlet or orange South African flowers grow fast, in clumps, and will thrive in full sun.



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**5 Gladioli:** Plant deep, in rich soil, water well, and you will have long-lasting flowers for cutting, in many colours.



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**6 Bearded iris:** Classic cottage garden beauties. Their size and elegance make them ideal for indoor arrangements.

## How to plant summer-flowering bulbs in your beds and borders

Create a stunning show of summer colour throughout your garden



For the best display, plant bulbs in clumps of at least six plants. Dig a hole that is wide and deep enough to take all your bulbs. Work out their planting depth by measuring their length, and plant them at two or three times it.



If the soil is poor or heavy, add lots of multi-purpose or well-rotted garden compost. Plant bulbs at twice their own width apart. Water well, clearly mark their position and label so you don't accidentally dig them up.



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I'm sowing some morning glories for a climbing splash of colour

*Ipomoea* 'Heavenly Blue'

## Sowing annual climbers

There are some beautiful annual summer-flowering climbers for sowing over the next few weeks, says **Ruth**

**F**EW gardeners, it seems, grow a range of flowering annual climbing plants – the plants that are sown now, grow and flower in summer, and then are thrown away in the autumn. The most commonly grown of these plants is, of course, sweet peas. But there are many others, too (see panel right).

One of my favourites, and one that is very easy to grow, is the morning glory (*Ipomoea tricolor* 'Heavenly Blue'), with its intense large sky blue trumpet flowers that are at their absolute best when the early morning sun falls on them during high summer. It is available from all of the main seed companies. However, there are also other colours: pale blue ('Fragrant Sky'), purple ('Star of Yelta'), pink ('Candy Pink') and white (*Ipomoea alba*).

With 'Heavenly Blue', flowers up to 2½in

(6cm) across appear throughout summer. It prefers a sunny, sheltered, warm site, and is ideal for growing up trellis panels, fences, poles, and so on. It is also suitable for greenhouse or conservatory growing.

Soak the seeds overnight in cold water to prime them. Sow them in trays or pots on the surface of a good, free draining, damp seed compost with ¼in (6mm) layer of compost or vermiculite over the top.

Place in a propagator at 20–30°C (68–86°F) or seal the pot inside a clear polythene bag and put it on a warm windowsill. Germination usually takes between 10–17 days. All the seeds (right) can be sown like this.

Transplant seedlings into 5in (13cm) pots, and grow on in cooler conditions for at least two weeks before planting out in late spring after all risk of frost.

## Plant out forced bulbs after flowers

Give Xmas bulbs a second chance



**1** Christmas hyacinth bulbs will by now be sorry looking plants with dead flower stalks and leaves. Let them die down and then cut them off. First acclimatise the plants – stand the pot outdoors in the day, bring it in at night.



**2** After a week of acclimatisation, plant the bulbs in the garden. Set them twice as deep as the height of the bulb, and a bulb's width apart. Cover with soil, water then mulch. Mark their position – they'll flower next spring.

## Other annual climbers to try

■ **Cup and saucer vine** (*Cobaea scandens*): The purple bell-shaped 'flowers can be 2½in (6cm) across.

■ **Black-eyed Susan** (*Thunbergia alata*): Bright orange blooms with a black centre.

■ **Nasturtium** (*Tropaeolum majus*): Long-flowering plants that scramble over walls, sheds, fences etc.



# Your Gardening Week

with Peter Seabrook, AG's classic gardening expert



The pretty purple and white streaked flowers of *Primula* 'Blackberry Ice' make a stunning spring display, particularly when planted alongside yellow spring flowers

## Primroses to watch out for

New primrose varieties give us even more spring colour, says **Peter**

**T**HE plant breeder's pollinating brushes have done remarkable things to the wild primrose, now we have them flowering from September to summer in every colour of the rainbow. Even so the pale yellow of our wild species en masse and among bluebells in woodland take some beating.

The breeders haven't overlooked this charm and one recent hardy introduction is 'Everlast' from Belgium with pale yellow flowers. 'Everlast' is the right name for this novelty – it mirrors winter flowering pansies and viola with a mass of flowers from September right through winter and spring.

In my own garden compact primrose plants appear to be self-cleaning with more new flowers opening above the older fading blooms. The rich green leaves spread out like a ruff increasing in size as the mound of flowers gets larger.

Shades in modern hybrid primroses, bred for pot sales, are becoming ever more exotic

**“Flowers through winter and spring”**

and while most are sold as mixtures their appearance in borders and containers is better with some colour coordination. Blue and yellow or cream work well together as do russet and red shades. Worth noting that when planting outside it is advisable to go for dark leaved types, which usually have greater hardiness.

Four modern primrose colours have been mass-produced for current sales this month. They are: 'Blackberry Ice'; 'Cherry Blossom'; 'Clotted Cream' (a very popular rich cream); and 'Firecracker'. All are real eye catchers and stocked by garden centres including Notcutts, Squires and Strikes.

### Peter's tips for perfect primroses



**1** Vine weevil larvae go for the roots of all primulas. So spray after flowering to ensure they don't undermine the plant.



**2** In warm temperatures biological control or systemic insecticide offer best protection for perennial types of primroses.



**3** White flecks and/or stickiness on leaves indicates the presence of aphid attack and the need to control them.



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# Your Gardening Week

with AG's gardening expert Marc Rosenberg



I'm using big pots to coax my dahlia tubers into growth

## Start dahlias in pots

You can cheat the seasons by getting dahlia tubers underway in a frost-free greenhouse now, says **Marc**

**D**AHLIAS have experienced a surge in popularity, and it's easy to see why. Flowering from late June and putting on their finest display in early autumn, dahlias will fill your garden with colour at a time when many other plants are running out of steam.

You may wonder why I'm planting frost-tender dahlia tubers in chilly February. The answer is that I want to cheat the seasons.

It seems cruel when autumn frosts cut a

dahlia display short. So I want mine to flower as early in the summer as possible.

While you wouldn't normally plant dahlia tubers outdoors until after Easter, you can start them now in a frost-free greenhouse.

I'm starting off with my favourite variety, the rich-red 'Bishop of Llandaff' – complemented by the pinky-white 'Bishop of Dover' and the red-and-yellow cactus-type 'Tahiti Sunrise'. See my step-by-step (right) on how to plant tubers in big pots.

## Pruning a winter-flowering jasmine

- Prune winter-flowering jasmine (*Jasminum nudiflorum*) after flowering.
- Jasmine blooms on the previous year's growth, so cutting it back immediately after flowering gives it time to produce new stems to carry flower buds.
- Cut back flowered stems to a strong sideshoot, lower down the branch. Then thin out crowded, crossing or misplaced branches, and remove weak stems.
- Winter jasmine will tolerate hard pruning, and can be cut back to within 2ft (60cm) of the base, though this can delay flowering for a year or two.



Cut back flowered stems to a strong sideshoot

Step by step

### Starting dahlia tubers in pots



**1** Choose big, deep pots with plenty of drainage holes. Pots should have a minimum diameter of 12in (30cm).



**2** Dahlias like rich, well-drained compost so choose a quality multi-purpose with incorporated fertiliser.



**3** Set the plant about (4in/10cm) deep in the pot. Fan out the tubers with the central stem pointing upwards.



**4** Top-up the container with compost, water well, label and keep at a minimum temperature of 5°C (41°F).



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# Your Gardening Week

with Lucy Chamberlain, AG's fruit and veg expert



Pruning keeps fruit trees tidy, and the crop bigger and healthier

Step by step

## Prune apple & pear trees



**1** As with all pruning, first cut out any dead, diseased or damaged growth. These older trees are showing a few signs of fungal canker so that's what I'm focusing on.



**2** I'll then cut out larger stems. In grass, any in the way of the mower are targeted and, to make life easier, so are those that are so high they're not easy to pick from.



**3** Now it's a case of thinning out the growth that remains. Cut out totally any shoots in the middle of the tree, and those that are congested or crossing over each other.



**4** This last step only applies if you have a spur-bearing variety (all pears and most apples are this). Cut back all long sideshoots to 3-5in (8-12cm). This encourages fruit spurs.

## Prune apples & pears

It's time to sow a few early vegetables, but first **Lucy** deals with fruit – starting with pruning apple and pear trees

**W**HILE cordon and espalier trees are pruned in summer to limit re-growth, free-standing apple and pear trees benefit from cutting back now. Before the leaves grow, you can clearly see their outline. Keep as many fruit buds as possible – these are round and plump whereas leaf buds are flat

and arch-shaped. It's then simply a case of shaping the tree. While all pear trees and most apples are spur bearing – that's what I'm pruning here – there are tip-bearing varieties. For tip bearers, follow steps one to three, but omit step four. Your local fruit nursery may be able to help you identify if your tree is tip or spur bearing.

## Force rhubarb

THERE'S a congested patch of rhubarb at East Donyland Hall where I work as head gardener – or rather, there was. I've just lifted the huge crowns and dug over the bed. To freshen it up two barrowloads of soil were removed and replaced with well rotted manure. I also added slow-release feed and some mycorrhizal fungi – rhubarb has a big appetite! I'll leave the crowns on the surface for a few days to get properly chilled – this helps them spring into life. Larger sections will be replanted in the bed, then covered with a forcing pot to exclude light which produces more tender stems. Insulating the pots with straw and manure will bring warmth for an earlier harvests.



I'll put this forcing pot over replanted rhubarb crowns for a crop of blanched stems (inset)



**Next Week:** Lucy shows how to protect peach blossom, plant gooseberries, warm cold soils for early sowings, and get some garlic in the soil



## Sow indoor tomatoes



All images unless credited

Sow tomatoes for growing in the greenhouse now. One of my favourites is 'Cuor de Bue' (above)

**I** WOULD imagine that a good three quarters of gardeners grow at least a few tomatoes, and I'm one of them. My parents were commercial tomato growers, cultivating over half an acre of them under glass each year. My ambitions now are far less ambitious but I still wouldn't be without them.

There are advantages to sowing now to grow in a greenhouse – the extra warmth brings earliness and boosts sugar levels, and it also deters fungal blight. Not all of us have the luxury of a greenhouse, I know, and if you grow yours outside then you don't need to sow till mid March or later.

I sow them like my chilli peppers (see last week's column), 10 or so seeds to a 9cm pot of well watered seed compost. Press them down gently and cover with vermiculite, then pop them in a heated propagator set to at least 18°C. They'll emerge within a week.

I especially love cherry and beefsteak tomatoes, and was particularly taken with the rich flavour of cherry type 'Sweet Apéritif' at a trials day last year. For slicing toms, you can't go wrong with 'Cuor di Bue' and 'Ferline' in my books, but then of course, taste is utterly subjective.

Let me know your favourites and I'll give them a try, too!



## Force early strawberries

IT'S February, but think forward to May, where you've just plucked a punnet of bright scarlet strawberries from plants in your greenhouse, a full four weeks before outdoor plants start cropping.

With that tempting thought in mind, motivate yourself to brave the chill to bring a few plants under cover now.

I potted up plants in autumn for this purpose, but there's nothing to stop you lifting and potting up soil-grown plants now. You can even buy in cold-stored runners if your budget allows.

Choose an early variety that will crop sooner than others, such as 'Christine' and 'Honeoye'. Ensure also that the plants have experienced some frosts, which speeds flowering under cover. A conservatory or enclosed porch would do just as well as a greenhouse. There, with a little water and warmth, they'll gently begin to leaf up and flower.

## Sow early peas

**S**HELLING home-grown peas in the garden is utter decadence for veg growers – I wouldn't be without a row or two to symbolise the arrival of spring. Smooth-seeded peas are said to be harder than those with wrinkled seedcoats, so choose these for early sowings (try 'Feltham First' and 'Meteor'). Peas are happy to grow in cool conditions because it allows them to develop a strong root system to fend off

summer drought, giving you more flowers and pods. However, they won't germinate below 5°C so I start mine under cover.

Some bright spark came up with the idea of sowing them in guttering. I now do this every year because when you transplant there's little root disturbance. Sow a double staggered row of seeds ½in (1cm) deep into well-watered seed compost in the guttering, and then place somewhere bright, sheltered and warm.



Sow peas in guttering to make planting out later easy



# Your Gardening Week



with AG's gardening expert Ruth Hayes



Sowing lettuce seeds outside

I'm warming the cold, sodden soil in my raised bed, ready for early sowing

## Warm up the beds

**Ruth** explains how to prepare the soil ahead of seed sowing

**M**ARCH is when the vegetable-sowing season starts in earnest. But you can even sow the seeds of some types now, in late February (see panel, right).

Germination rates will be better if, in early January, you sit a few cloches over the soil, to pre-warm it. If you didn't, don't worry – you can still pre-warm the soil from now onwards, as it will get your first

vegetable seeds off to a better start.

Cover already dug and fertilised soil with clear plastic sheeting, or cloches. Fleece is less good, as it gets wet and the insulation can be compromised. Black polythene is also effective, but it should be stretched taut, in close contact with the soil.

If your soil is clay, it is better to use cloches, which allow a little of the winter soil moisture to evaporate before sowing.



You can start sowing radishes in March

Mr Fothergills

## Get ready to sow

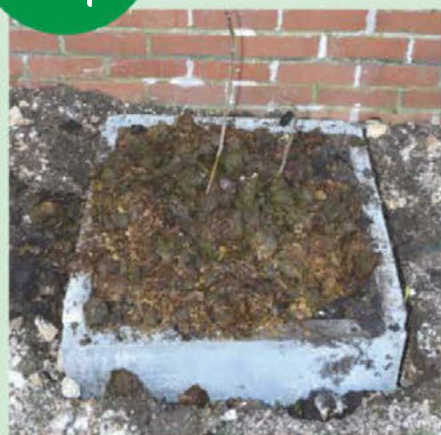
While the soil is warming, make sure you've got the following seeds to sow outdoors from late February:

- **Root veg:** carrots.
- **Greens:** broccoli, summer cabbage, summer cauliflower, corn salad (lamb's lettuce), and some types of lettuce.
- **Legumes:** broad beans, mangetout.
- **Others:** spring onions, leeks.

From March onwards the above can still all be sown, along with: globe artichokes, beetroot, Brussels sprouts, parsley, kale, onions, parsnips, peas, radishes (above), endive, spinach and pak choi.

Step by step

## Planting a fig in a pit



Firm in your fig, and top dress with more compost or well-rotted manure. Varieties you can choose from include 'Brown Turkey', 'Brunswick' and 'White Marseilles'.



**1** Figs thrive with restricted roots (which boosts fruiting) in any well-drained soil, so dig a hole 2ft sq (60cm sq) at the base of a sunny south or south-west facing wall.



**3** To improve your fig's drainage, start filling your pit by adding a layer of rubble or broken bricks and corks 4-8in (10-20cm) deep, in the base.



**2** Line the sides with paving slabs set vertically, with top edges protruding 1in (2.5cm) above the surrounding soil, to prevent the roots from spreading.



**4** Fill the pit with soil mixed with well-rotted organic matter. Plant your fig 8in (20cm) from the base of the wall, and at the same depth as growing in its pot.



# Your Gardening Week

with Bob Flowerdew, AG's organic gardening expert



The quality of your chosen seed compost will determine the quality of your eventual harvest

## The right compost gives better results

**Bob** considers the importance of seed and potting composts – and how you can improve them to get the best from plants

**R**IGHT now we are starting off many of our most important crops and flowers of the year in pots and trays of compost. The type of compost you use and its quality will not only determine the size and health of the harvest or flower performance, but equally could destroy it entirely!

Don't use potting or multipurpose compost for sowing seeds – it has too much fertiliser in it. The fertiliser in this

**“Sieve compost as seeds need air to germinate”**

type of compost may start to break down and poison the delicate new roots of seedlings, rather than feed them.

I find I have more success when I use a proper sowing compost (which is designed to be low in nutrients). Once germination has occurred, I prick out the seedlings into potting or multipurpose compost, when

they are stronger and more able to cope.

Bags of packed down compost become anaerobic (lacking in oxygen), so correcting this is important – more so for sowing compost, but also for potting and multipurpose. Sieving compost into trays will help re-introduce air, which seeds need to germinate and grow.

Never 'help' by adding fertiliser of any sort to a sowing compost (though I find a little coarsely ground charcoal helps with known-to-be-slow seed).

You can add long-term fertility, such as bone meal to most other composts, as this is expensive stuff and seldom included generously by the compost producers.

However, I reckon most potting and multipurpose composts are better improved by mixing with leaf mould and sieved garden compost. These supply active humus, important soil micro-life and minerals really feeding the plants. Unfortunately there are usually loads of weed seeds, too. Thus, I pot with this mix but add half an inch of the unimproved stuff to the surface to stop weeds.

Not only do I reckon the mix is better for the plants, but it's also heavier and so pots stay upright more easily.

### Bob's top tips for this week:



**1** Start onion sets (baby onions) and shallots in multi-celled trays or pots of multipurpose compost under cover.



**2** Sow broad beans in pots undercover or outdoors in sheltered, southern gardens that have free-draining soil.



**3** Check the posts, supports and ties of newly planted trees and shrubs before growth resumes.



**4** Lift and divide congested daffodils that aren't flowering very well. Leave the foliage on after transplanting.



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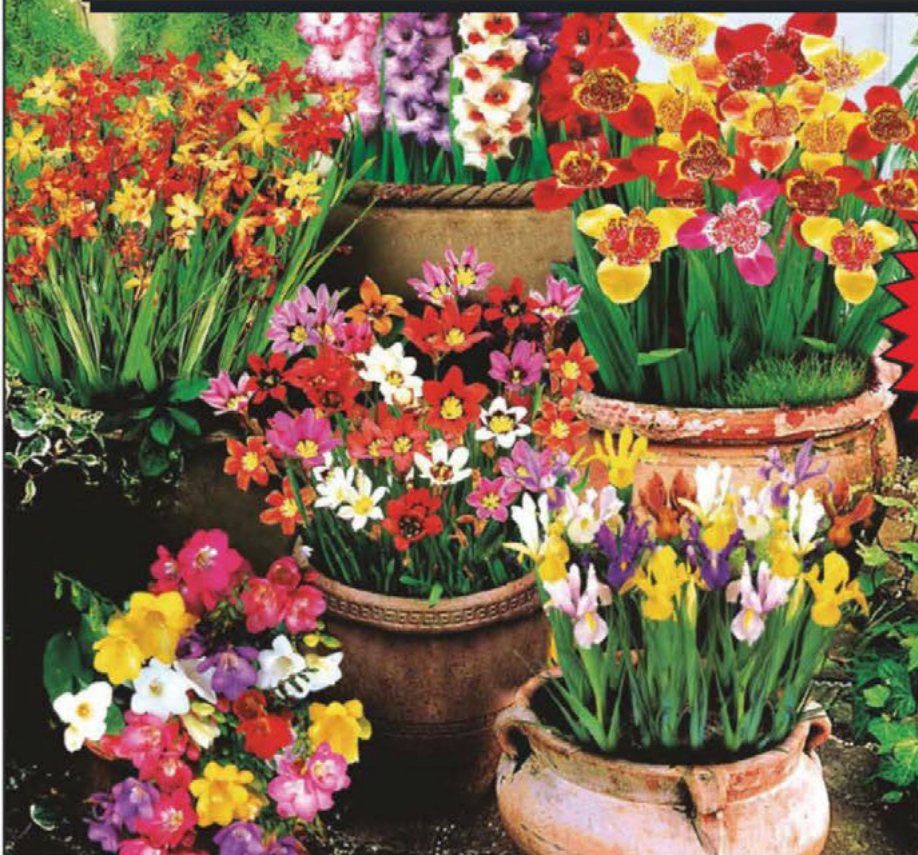
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**HM**



# Your Gardening Week

with AG's gardening wildlife expert Graham Clarke



What's On!

**February 20  
– February 26**

■ **20–21 Feb:** Great Dixter Opening (Hellebores and winter plants), Great Dixter, Northiam, Rye TN31 6PH; ☎ 01797 252878; 🌐 [greatdixter.co.uk](http://greatdixter.co.uk)

■ **20–21 Feb:** Large and Small Scarecrow Making, RHS Garden Hyde Hall, Creep hedge Lane, Rettendon Common, Chelmsford CM3 8ET ☎ 0845 2658071 🌐 [rhs.org.uk/gardens/hyde-hall](http://rhs.org.uk/gardens/hyde-hall)

■ **20–21 Feb:** See the Snowdrops, Colesbourne Gardens, Colesbourne Park, Nr Cheltenham, Glos GL53 9NP; ☎ 01242 870264/01242 870567; 🌐 [colesbournegardens.org.uk](http://colesbournegardens.org.uk)

■ **20 Feb–6 March:** Snowdrops and Hellebores, Coton Manor, Coton, Northants NN6 8RQ; ☎ 01604 740219; 🌐 [cotonmanor.co.uk](http://cotonmanor.co.uk)

■ **23 Feb:** Willow for beginners, Barnsdale Gardens, The Avenue, Exton, Oakham, Rutland, LE15 8AH; ☎ 01572 813 200; 🌐 [barnsdalegardens.co.uk](http://barnsdalegardens.co.uk)

■ **24 Feb:** Vintage Wedding Flowers, RHS Garden Hyde Hall, Creep hedge Lane, Rettendon Common, Chelmsford CM3 8ET; ☎ 0845 2658071; 🌐 [rhs.org.uk/gardens/hyde-hall](http://rhs.org.uk/gardens/hyde-hall)



Barnsdale kitchen garden

■ **24 Feb:** Making the Most of your Kitchen Garden, Barnsdale Gardens, Rutland, LE15 8AH; ☎ 01572 813 200; 🌐 [barnsdalegardens.co.uk](http://barnsdalegardens.co.uk)

■ **26 Feb:** Harlow Carr Winter Walk, RHS Garden Harlow Carr, Crag Lane, Harrogate, Yorks HG3 1QB 🌐 [rhs.org.uk/gardens/harlow-carr](http://rhs.org.uk/gardens/harlow-carr)

■ **26 Feb:** Designing with Plants, RHS Garden Hyde Hall, Creep hedge Lane, Rettendon Common, Chelmsford CM3 8ET; ☎ 0845 2658071; 🌐 [rhs.org.uk/gardens/hyde-hall](http://rhs.org.uk/gardens/hyde-hall)

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Frogs are laying spawn (inset) in ponds now and tadpoles will soon hatch

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## Amphibious visitors

Frog spawn is a sign of Spring says **Graham Clarke**

**W**E'RE entering a new breeding year for all those amphibious creatures in our garden ponds. First to begin their spawning rituals are frogs – probably one of the most welcome as they roam the garden, devouring slugs and other pests in their wake. Clumps of frogspawn will start appearing any time from now onwards.

Even in what still seems like the depths of winter it always surprises me that the jelly-like spawn can become frozen at the pond surface, yet it doesn't seem to impact on the number of tadpoles you see swimming around a few weeks later. The answer lies in the fact that being frozen almost certainly does kill spawn, but any under the ice should survive if it's in deep enough water.

Toads are probably still in hibernation and you're unlikely to see them active for a few more weeks. They can hibernate up to a mile away from the spawning pond, surviving winter under piles of leaves and holes in the soil. But watch out mid to late spring for the strings of eggs when they can be seen wound around submerged pondweed.

I have to say, though, that my favourite forms of pondlife are the newts. Smooth, crested and palmate newts are shy, secretive, lizard-like creatures – but they are just as beneficial as frogs and toads in terms of eating garden pests. Currently hibernating amongst pondside vegetation, or under large, flat stones, they'll be laying their eggs in a month or so individually, in the pondweed.

### Spot the difference



Greenfinch



Siskin

DO greenfinches visit your garden? Their big, solid beaks and green-brown colouring (with yellow edges to the wings and tail) give them an air of importance. Take another look though because your greenfinches could be siskins! The female siskin, particularly, is very similar to the greenfinch, with its yellow tail edges. Siskins are also usually smaller, and tend to inhabit woodlands more than gardens.



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# This week's Free Seeds



How to sow with Anne Swithinbank



Free with AG this week: French Marigold 'Naughty Marietta'



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## How to get the most out of your French marigolds

**W**ITH their origins in Mexico, French marigolds are half-hardy annuals, meaning they are frost-tender and complete their germination, growth and seed-setting in one growing season.

'Naughty Marietta' is an old favourite, reaching 10in (25cm) high, with masses of single flowers to brighten up greenhouses, borders and pots.

Large seeds are almost impatient to germinate and plants grow fast, so you might wonder why they are a February free gift. The answer lies in their distinctive smell which acts as a deterrent to whitefly, a troublesome sap sucking pest, especially under glass.

The strong aroma overwhelms and disguises that of tomatoes and other plants, so the flies fail to home in on them.

Sow your marigolds now, let them grow alongside tomatoes and they will quietly protect them. When introduced after an

infestation of whitefly has broken out, marigolds are less effective.

### Aftercare

When roots appear at the sides of the Jiffy-7 net, plant or pot the young marigolds without delay. So far, they've enjoyed the benefit of growing and developing in their own space without competition or disturbance.

Technically, roots should grow seamlessly out into surrounding soil or compost but I tear the net away.

Pot into 3.5in (9cm) pots and then into greenhouse beds; singly to 6in (15cm) pots or three to a 10in (25cm) pot. Water well and give fortnightly liquid feeds for flowering plants.

### Other methods

To use French marigolds as bedding plants outdoors, sow again at the beginning of April. Under glass, they don't require extra heat and germinate readily in modules or a

seed tray, with seedlings transplanted one per 3.5in (9cm) pot.

Plant out 8in (20cm) apart after the last frosts (usually the end of May). If you have no greenhouse, sow in a tray outdoors or even direct into moistened seed drills.



The scent of marigolds can deter sap-sucking pests

### Problem solver



SLUGS and snails can be troublesome. One method is to apply the biological control Nemaslug (above). Microscopic worm-like creatures enter the slugs, infect them with a bacteria and then feed on them after they've died. Nematodes remain active for six weeks but can help to reduce slug populations into the following year.





## Step-by-step: sow French marigold 'Naughty Marietta'

Step by step



**1** Soak Jiffy-7 coir pellets in water until they have swollen fully (soak the same number of pellets as plants you intend to sow). Pick them out and prop them up together in a seed tray.



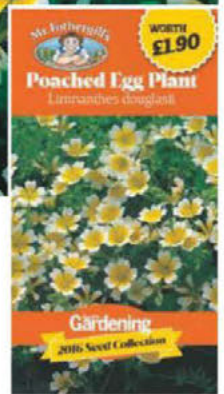
**2** Using a dibber, widen the dimple at the centre of each swollen pellet and drop a seed in. If you want to be double sure, put two in and remove one seedling after germination.



**3** Push compost back over the seed, water in lightly to settle and place them in a warm propagating case (15-18°C/ 60-65°F). Lift out as soon as they have germinated.



Easy to grow: poached egg plant (*Limnanthes douglasii*)



## How to start your poached egg plants

**T**HIS wild flower of California and Oregon is a hardy annual, also used as a companion plant. White flowers with sunny, yolk-coloured centres attract pollinating insects like bees and hoverflies (whose larvae eat lots of aphids).

I scattered seed onto a patch of soil in our kitchen garden many years ago and have never had to sow it again.

Seed falls in summer, germinates in August and September and the plants replace themselves every year, rarely spreading further.

## Poached egg plants: sowing and growing tips

■ Sow under glass now. Select a pack of modules with cells 1.5-2in (4-5cm) square, fill with multipurpose compost and sow three seeds to each cell. Leave on staging to germinate in natural temperatures, grow on, harden off and plant a trowel length apart.

■ To cheer up your greenhouse, pot three cells of plants into a 6in (15cm) pan (shallow pot) of 50:50 John Innes No 2 and a soilless compost. Display on the staging.

■ You can also sow direct to the soil. In March, or when weed seeds begin to germinate (indicating that soil has warmed-up and dried out), rake good soil in a mainly sunny position to a



Rake soil into a fine tilth before sowing

fine surface 'tilth'. Scatter seed thinly and evenly and then rake in lightly. But if the ground is dry, make parallel drills 4-5in (10-13cm) apart, soak the bases and sow into these. Thin out seedlings so they are at least 4in (10cm) apart and water during dry spells. Direct sowings also work well in September when soil is warm and moist.



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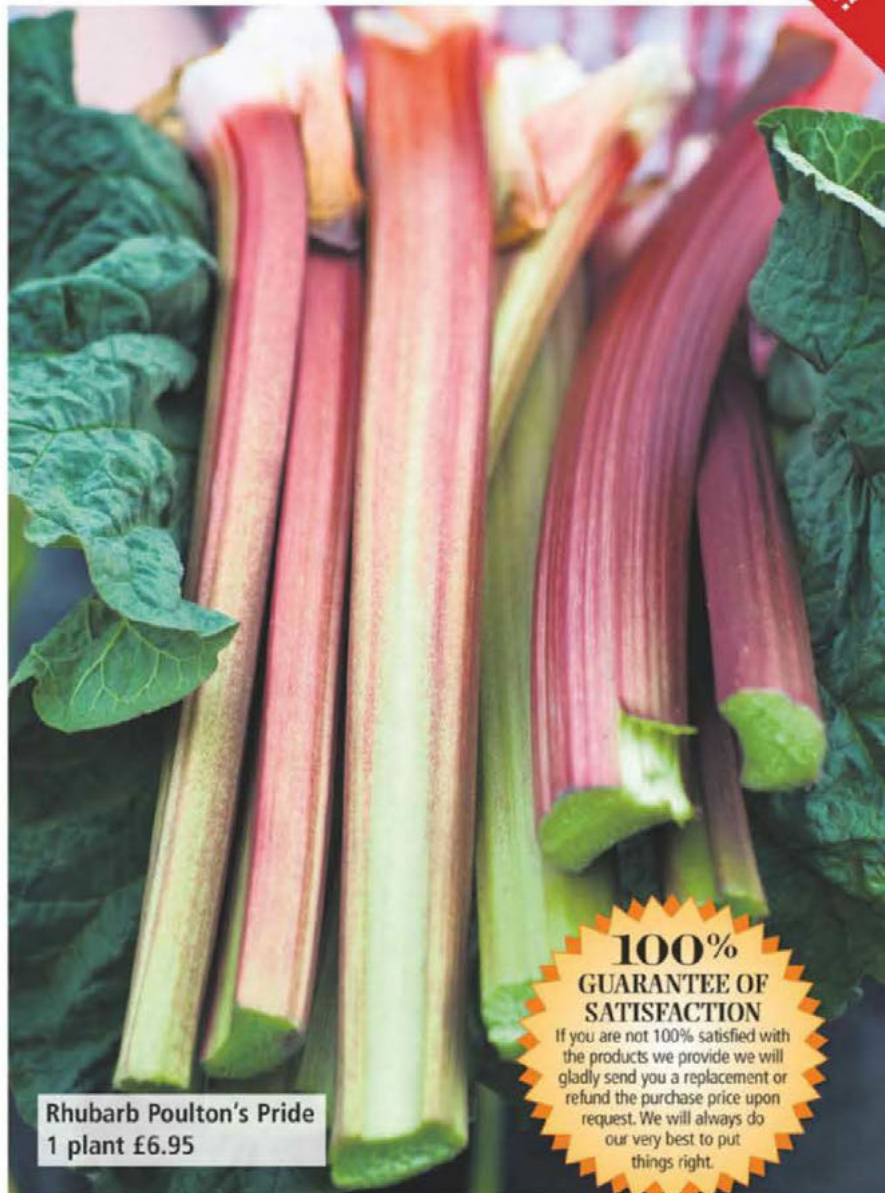
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# Your Gardening Week

with Tamsin Westhorpe in her country garden



Now is a great time to buy and plant both potted and bare-root hedging plants

The benefit of buying bare-root is that you can inspect the roots



Soak roots before heeling in

Altimedre unless credited



Heel in at a 45 degree angle and protect plants from rabbits!

## Shopping for hedging plants

**Tamsin** invests in bare root and potted specimens

**T**HE gardens here at Stockton Bury are surrounded by a working farm and we are fortunate enough to have borrowed views of the countryside. This allows us to plant hedges in the surrounding fields to block out or emphasise what the eye can see. From the Dingle Garden the view looks out over the polytunnel, which I plan to disguise by planting a native hedge of beech (*Fagus sylvatica*). I've also invested in some *Thuja*

*plicata* to screen the wheelie bins and some potted holly to fill in gaps around the boundaries.

Hedging is reasonably priced if purchased bare root in the dormant season. In fact, I estimate you'll pay around 50% less than the price of potted specimens. I buy trees locally at specialist nursery Frank P Matthews in Worcestershire. They stock bare-rooted plants from mid-November until March

and potted specimens all year.

Once back in the garden my selection of bare-rooted plants have their roots soaked in water for an hour and are then heeled in. I'm planning to plant quite soon, so they have been heeled into the south-facing kitchen garden still in their bundles. If you can't plant for over a month after buying then divide the bundles and heel them into a north-facing spot to keep them dormant for as long as possible.



An old door comes in very useful when I'm spreading muck on the kitchen garden

## Tips for wet weather gardening

HEREFORDSHIRE is renowned for its high rainfall. But, when possible I continue to garden. If you're like me and aren't put off by the wet you need to be cautious as you can do more harm than good. Here are my wet-weather gardening tips: -

- To avoid compacting soil work off boards. Old scaffold boards are ideal, but a favourite of mine is an old door!
- Avoid pushing heavy barrow loads across your prize lawn, unless you have created a path of boards to spread the load.

- Remove saucers under pots and raise pots on pot feet or bricks to aid drainage
- Unblock garden drains. You would be amazed how efficient a couple of leaves are at blocking them.
- Move containers under the eaves of the house to shelter them from the worst of the rain.
- If you are working on your knees wear knee pads over your trousers and then put waterproofs on top. This avoids working from a wet kneeling cushion.



**Tamsin Westhorpe** is a trained horticulturist, writer, lecturer, magazine editor and former deputy editor of AG who now gardens four acres at Stockton Bury Gardens in rural Herefordshire.

## Replace worn turf

Buying, laying and repairing lawn ready for the new season

THE gardens at Stockton Bury are open from April and hundreds of enthusiastic feet eventually cause damage to the lawns. So now's the time that we make repairs. Having just lifted turf to increase the size of a border we're making good use of it. Ideally turf should be laid as soon as it has been cut or delivered. Turfing can be carried out at any time of year, but avoid frost and dry weather. It's been really mild and moist here, so it's an ideal time.

We've skimmed off the old turf on a well worn path by cutting it into squares with a half moon and then lifting with a turving iron (doing it without one of these tools can prove a little tricky). Once lifted, loosen the soil area with a garden fork and then level and slightly compact it with a garden rake. Remove any stones.

If buying turf the standard length of a roll is about 5ft 4in x 1ft 3in (165cm x 40cm). This is cut to fit with a half-moon edger. As we've lifted our own turf it's a case of filling



the space with odds and sods. The benefit of using home-grown turf is that it is likely to be a very good match and it's free! Start laying from the straightest edge, placing a board over the area you've just laid. Ideally

stagger the joints. Once your jigsaw is complete, place a board over the turf to stand on and tamp it down with a garden rake. Try and stay off the area until it shows signs of growth.

## Keeping birch trees in top shape

Caring for birch is as simple as picking up sticks

AT the far end of the garden a group of mature silver birch (*Betula pendula*) create an open boundary that offers wind protection. However much I adore these trees, with their warty white trunks, they shed barrow loads of twigs at this time of year. After collecting the twigs they are stored in a dry place and later used to light the wood burner.

This is the time of year when many shrubs are being pruned. The birch doesn't need this but if you wish to keep them to a certain size and shape, hold off with the pruning saw. This is because the pressure of sap is high as we approach spring and birch can bleed when pruned. Old advice was to seal the wounds but it is now thought better to leave cuts to heal as open wounds. If you are planning to prune your birch wait until late summer when bleeding will be reduced.





# Your Gardening Week

with Tamsin Westhorpe in her country garden



Silty water is scooped out – the silt can be put in the garden

Pond pumps are turned off in the winter

## Last chance to tidy water features

OUR Dingle Garden is home to some man-made streams. In winter the pumps are turned off and we clean out the leaves and pond weed – a cold job but rewarding. Weed, cobbles and leaves are removed from the stream and placed just beside it. It's vital to leave the debris by the stream for 24 hours so any pond life can creep back in (if you have fish they should be placed in a holding tank of pond water). The water from

very muddy, silty pools is scooped out, weeds removed and then the stream cobbles replaced.



Cobbles and weeds are left by the stream

In such a narrow stream silt can take over, so this mucky task avoids the small pools turning from pond to bog garden. Larger ponds are best cleared out in autumn. Crack on with this task now before frogs arrive to breed. If they've already arrived you'll have to leave it.



Don't be tempted to clear gutters without a friend holding the ladder

The contents of your gutters can be added to the compost heap

## Clear those gutters

IT'S a regular task to keep gutters clear on our garden sheds and feature buildings here at Stockton Bury. In order to prevent the gutter from breaking under the strain we clear them about three times a year. The leaves and moss collected have usually started to break down and are a very useful addition to the compost heap.

I prefer to place the gutter contents into a black plastic bag, add some deciduous leaves and then tie the top of the bag. I then punch a few small holes in it and leave it in an out of the way place. Every so often I turn the bag the other way up. In about eight months the contents are miraculously turned into a leaf mould. So there is gold to be found in them there gutters!



New shoots need to be protected from voles

## Protect clematis

AS it's been so mild, many of our 50 clematis have started to produce new shoots. It's vital then that any stems found sprawling across the ground are lifted and supported, otherwise the shoots will be nibbled by the voles we seem to attract here. Nocturnal voles are active feeders all year, also feasting on pea seedlings and strawberries. If I spot them eating my favourite clematis, *Clematis tangutica* 'Bill Mackenzie' and *C. jackmanii* there'll be trouble.

Next week

with Martyn Cox  
*AG's city gardener*

### Pruning bamboo

How to reveal the true beauty of canes with some clever pruning.

### On the ledge

Martyn brightens up his dull window ledges with containers full of vibrant seasonal bedding and foliage plants.

### Surface clean

Free patios, decks, driveways and paths from the grime and algae that leaves them looking unsightly and slippery.

### Planting shallots in pots

You don't need an allotment to enjoy the tangy flavour of shallots. Martyn shows how to grow them in a container.



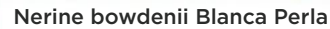


Exciting and admired in the autumn, easy to grow when planted in the winter months

rare | unusual | exciting



It is said that the flowers drifted across the sea from South Africa, eventually landing on the island of Guernsey, and therefore named in reference to the 50 daughters of the sea-god Nereus. Nowadays, Nerine are the darling with contemporary floral designers. Gloriously striking sprays of up to ten lily-like flowers with wavy re-curved petals appear on erect leafless stems in autumn. Strap-shaped foliage develops in the spring and will form impressive clumps over time. Grows best in very well-drained soil in full sun.



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- \* Hardy perennials delivered in 14 days

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Bare rooted plants are nothing to be wary of: it's how we all used to garden years ago

It's important to keep bare roots moist until planting time

# For top results choose bare roots

**Sue Bradley** explains what bare-rooted plants are and why planting them in February is the smart option

**J**UST a few decades ago, all gardeners – both professionals and amateurs – would be outside putting in bare rooted plants at this time of the year. They would do so fully expecting these unprepossessing clumps of leafless sticks to put down roots and get off to a great start once the weather warmed up.

Bare root plants are grown in open ground and lifted while dormant, with virtually no soil around their roots. They can be purchased and put into the garden at any point while they are dormant. In the case of deciduous plants this is generally the period between late autumn and March or April when they're without their leaves. Once they're in the ground they need very little attention other than a spot of water during dry periods.

Thompson and Morgan's horticulture expert Kris Collins says: "They simply don't know they are being lifted and transplanted. They're taken out of cold soil and put back into cold soil elsewhere while they're dormant; they essentially sleep through the process," he explains. "There's no transplant shock, they don't lose moisture through transpiration and they get off to the earliest start as soon as temperatures rise enough to initiate growth."

Another advantage to be had from buying bare rooted stock is the sheer choice it offers. Most nurseries offer a limited range in pots but can easily dig up and despatch less well known cultivars as bare roots over the winter months.

Rose expert Michael Marriott from David Austin Roses says: "we have a relatively smaller list of 150 or so containerised plants, whereas we have 700 different varieties in total,"

## "Buying plants in pots is just about convenience"

As if all this were not enough, bare rooted plants are usually cheaper than their potted equivalents because growers are able to save on the costs of compost, pots, and postage.

So, with so much going for planting bare rooted stock, why aren't we all doing it now?

The answer lies in the arrival of containerised plants some 30 years ago. These specimens, all neat and tidy in their plastic

pots, can be planted at any time of year.

Unlike bare rooted plants, they don't have to go into the ground straight away, and, more often than not, they're out on display when they have an attractive flush of leaves, and even flowers, which makes them easy on the eye.

The truth is, we've grown so used to the convenience of buying plants in pots that we've fallen out of the habit of ordering and planting bare rooted specimens over winter.

"Until the last 20 years or so it was normal to buy trees as bare rooted subjects," explains the Royal Horticultural Society's chief horticultural adviser Guy Barter. "However, the inconvenient seasonality of bare root plants does not sit well with modern trends in landscape construction, garden centre merchandising, the desire for instant gardening and the rise of the cash and carry outlets catering to landscapers."

Perennials expert Claire Austin well remembers the years when buying bare roots was the norm.

"Thirty years ago, or so, there were no plastic pots; when containerised plants first started appearing they were sold in poly bags," says Claire, who still sells peonies bare rooted.

"Buying bare roots is the same principle as when you have something in your garden that you want to divide. Bare rooted plants purchased from nurseries tend to be bigger plants than those sold in pots, and it's easier to check them for pests and diseases too." ■ ▶



# Top 18 bare roots to plant out now



## Lily of the Valley

Plant the roots (sometimes described as 'pips') of *Convallaria majalis* in moist soil in partial or full shade between now and late March to enjoy the sweet scent of this pretty flower in May. The rest of the year the foliage provides useful groundcover.

**Supplier:** Unwins ☎ 0844 573 8400, [unwins.co.uk](http://unwins.co.uk)



## Peonies

Steal a march on container-grown peonies by planting bare rooted specimens, which often go on to produce flowers within a season or two of planting. Buying bare rooted often results in acquiring bigger plants than their potted equivalents too.

**Supplier:** Claire Austin ☎ 01686 670 342, [claireaustin-hardyplants.co.uk](http://claireaustin-hardyplants.co.uk)



## TopTip

Plant trees and shrubs to the 'tide mark' that was created when they were growing in the ground

## Rose

Bare rooted is the traditional way to plant roses, and they're cheaper than potted specimens to boot. They will establish quickly and should flower in the first year.

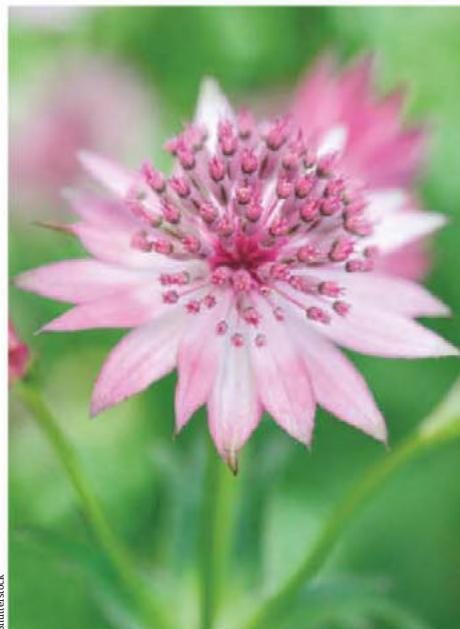
**Supplier:** David Austin Roses ☎ 01902 376300, [davaudainroses.co.uk](http://davaudainroses.co.uk)



## Angelica gigas

These impressive plants add height and drama to the borders, and are popular with bees and butterflies; their stems can even be used in cooking! Seed germination rates can be erratic, so it's definitely worth growing angelica from bare root plants.

**Supplier:** Unwins ☎ 0844 573 8400, [unwins.co.uk](http://unwins.co.uk)



## Atrantia

Enliven a sunny or shady border throughout the summer with the pincushion flowers of this old cottage garden favourite. Flower colours range from white to dusty pink through to plum purples and sultry reds.

**Supplier:** Van Meuwen ☎ 0844 557 1850, [vanmeuwen.com](http://vanmeuwen.com)



## Apples

It's worth getting expert advice on the best types for your garden, bearing in mind choices of root stocks and your soil type. Many are generally grafted stock that are sold in pots, but bare rooted plants are also available.

**Supplier:** Orange Pippin Trees ☎ 01759 392007, [orangepippintrees.co.uk](http://orangepippintrees.co.uk)



# Top 18 bare roots to plant now



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## Damsons, plums and gages

Members of the prunus family are happier grown in the ground rather than grafted and in pots due to the need for their sap to move freely, so should always be planted bare rooted. Most varieties are self-fertile.

**Suppliers:** Grow Brogdale ☎ 01795 531888, 🌐 brogdaleonline.co.uk; Ken Muir ☎ 01255 830181, 🌐 kenmuir.co.uk



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## Geranium psilostemon

Plant a root in winter and marvel at the speed at which it will cover a bare border with its bold magenta-coloured flowers. It offers another season of interest too, with the large mid-green, deeply cut leaves turning a dazzling red during autumn.

**Supplier:** Claire Austin ☎ 01686 670 342, 🌐 claireaustin-hardyplants.co.uk



Shutterstock

## Persicaria 'Firedance'

Get ground covering clumps of rich red flowers between July and November from this "well behaved" persicaria. Good with grasses and late summer flowers like helenium and sedum. Will grow in full sun or part shade, but needs moist soil.

**Supplier:** Toby Buckland Nurseries ☎ 01626 891133, 🌐 tobybuckland.com

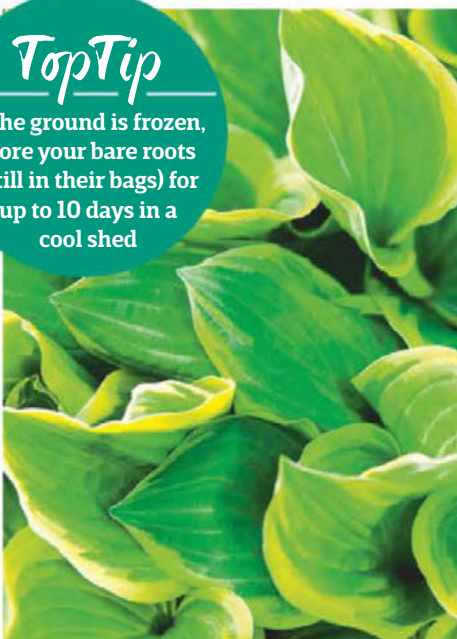


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## Raspberry

Both autumn and summer fruiting varieties can be planted now for delicious berries from June through to October. They will need a sunny spot and fertile soil. Summer varieties require supporting but autumn types are usually fine without.

**Supplier:** Thompson & Morgan ☎ 0844 573 1818, 🌐 thompson-morgan.com



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## Hosta

Plant with a good helping of garden compost – you'll get thick, lush leaves if you keep hostas well fed. They need shade and moist soil. There are hundreds of varieties of hostas to choose from so there's one for every garden.

**Supplier:** Sue Proctor Plants ☎ 01484 866189, 🌐 sueproctorplants.co.uk



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## Phlox paniculata

Add colour and enchanting scent to a summer border by planting these beautiful mid-height perennials. Choose from violet to lavender purple, white, pink or orange-red. Attractive to bees and butterflies and tolerant of all soils, sun or shade.

**Supplier:** Hayloft ☎ 01386 562999, 🌐 hayloft-plants.co.uk

**TopTip**  
If the ground is frozen, store your bare roots (still in their bags) for up to 10 days in a cool shed





CAP

### **Papaver orientale**

'Patty's Plum', 'Perry's White' and 'Turkenlouis' are the stand-out varieties. Because bare roots are the cheaper option, why not go for a selection? These perennial poppies with large ruffled blooms will come back year after year.

**Supplier:** Jersey Plants ☎ 01534 871 113, [jerseyplantsdirect.com](http://jerseyplantsdirect.com)



CAP

### **Box (Buxus sempervirens)**

Evergreens such as box can be planted as bare roots, whether as standalone shrubs to grow on for topiary or for hedging. Pre-shaped box topiary is expensive, so it's worth considering the bare root option and creating your own.

**Supplier:** Hedges Direct ☎ 01257 263873, [hedgesdirect.co.uk](http://hedgesdirect.co.uk)



CAP

### **Beech (Fagus sylvatica)**

Bare root beech are cheap and generally establish better than potted specimens. These beautiful hedging plants are grown for their fluttery soft green leaves that turn a coppery colour in autumn. A great alternative to evergreen hedging.

**Supplier:** Hedges Direct ☎ 01257 263873, [hedgesdirect.co.uk](http://hedgesdirect.co.uk)



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### **Amelanchier lamarckii**

A great ornamental tree for a small garden. Amelanchier produces pretty white flowers in spring along with young coppery foliage, which turns a glorious purple-red in autumn. Can also be used for hedging. Grows to around 13ft (8m).

**Supplier:** Mail Order Trees ☎ 0800 066 5972, [mailordertrees.co.uk](http://mailordertrees.co.uk)



CAP

### **Strawberry 'Mara des Bois'**

Plant this chef's favourite now in containers or the ground to enjoy crops of this intensely flavoured perpetual-fruiting berry during the summer months. Often found in French markets, it's a favourite among connoisseurs!

**Supplier:** Fothergill's ☎ 0333 777 3936, [mr-fothergills.co.uk](http://mr-fothergills.co.uk)



CAP

### **Asparagus**

Why pay for expensive supermarket asparagus when you can grow your own? Plant roots – known as 'crowns' – in a well-prepared, weedless area of soil. Resist temptation to harvest spears in the first year so that energy goes into the plant.

**Supplier:** Thompson & Morgan ☎ 0844 573 1818, [thompson-morgan.com](http://thompson-morgan.com)



## Health 'n' safety hedge wars!

140 year-old yew is deemed a threat to pedestrians

**C**OUNCIL jobsworths ordered an 89 year-old pensioner to trim back his 328ft (100m) historic hedge, because of barmy health and safety fears.

Roy Dowson was told to cut the yew hedge, originally planted 140 years ago and presently over 8ft (2.5m) high, after pedestrians allegedly complained that there wasn't enough room to walk along the pavement.

Officials from Lincolnshire County Council descended on the sleepy village of Burton-by-Lincoln, Lincolnshire, last month and ordered Roy to axe the hedge by 24 February.

### Slow-growing

But the pensioner, who has his pristine hedge trimmed every year, says cutting it back to the wall would ruin it.

He said: "It will absolutely wreck it. This

**"Cutting it back is environmental vandalism"**



Roy cut a bit of his hedge (circled) to show how it will look if he's forced to trim the lot

hedge has been at the property for 40 years.

They are making a mountain out of a molehill."

His daughter, Heather Dowson, added: "Yew is slow growing and it will take a while to look any good if it's cut down."

The hedge was first planted in 1880 and is a feature of Burton-by-Lincoln, a village that features in the Domesday Book.

Councillor John Copeland is supporting Roy and said to cut back the popular hedge would be "environmental vandalism".

He added: "You can easily walk along the path and this hedge is a lovely feature of the village that should be looked after."



Both: SWNS

But Lincolnshire County Council insisted that the hedge was putting people at "risk from passing traffic".

### Several complaints

Paul Little, highways network manager north, added: "We had to ask a resident to cut a yew hedge back to ensure the safety of pedestrians wishing to use the pavement."

"The hedge is encroaching over half of the pavement in places, and we've received several complaints from pedestrians who have been forced to walk in the road in between two blind bends."

"This is putting them at unnecessary risk from passing traffic," Paul argued.

## Schools set to grow rocket seeds from space



Tim Peake in the International Space Station with rocket seeds floating in zero gravity!

GREEN-fingered UK astronaut Tim Peake has helped to inspire kids to take-up gardening – by sending a message from the International Space Station (ISS).

Backing an initiative by the RHS Campaign for School Gardening and UK Space Agency, Tim appeared in a video from the ISS. He floated in zero gravity with rocket seeds that, when they return to Earth in March, will be distributed for half a million young people to grow.

Tim has already coaxed a zinnia into flower on the ISS, over 200 miles above Earth, while orbiting the planet 16 times a day

at over 17,000 miles per hour.

Speaking from space, Tim said: "Conditions on the ISS are very different from planet Earth, due to us being weightless in orbit. This experiment will aim to see if micro-gravity will affect the growth mechanisms of seeds."

In April, up to 10,000 schools will grow the 2kg of seeds that have been in space since September, alongside rocket seeds that have never left the planet, in a national experiment.

➔ <https://schoolgardening.rhs.org.uk/Competitions/Rocket-Science-Application-Form> to apply for seeds from space.





#### THE DAILY TELEGRAPH GARDEN

Garden designer and TV presenter Andy Sturgeon (left) has been chosen to mastermind The Daily Telegraph's garden at this year's RHS Chelsea Flower Show (24-28 May).

Gardeners' Question Time this week

#### On this week's programme...

Bob Flowerdew, Matthew Wilson and Bunny Guinness join Eric Robson in Derby. BBC Radio 4 at 3pm on Friday 19 February (repeated at 2pm on Sunday 21 February)

## Charlie Dimmock prunes the cost of gardening in deal with Poundland

TV gardener Charlie Dimmock has been signed-up by High Street discounter Poundland to bring out an exclusive gardening range.

Charlie, the former *Ground Force* star, is launching her range at Poundland's 900 UK stores from 29 February.

It will feature 130 lines, including hand tools, a hanging bird feeder, gloves, pressure sprayers, wooden signs and solar lights – all priced at £1.



Cut-price gardening: Charlie Dimmock will have her own product range in Poundland

#### Affordable

Charlie's former *Ground Force* co-presenter Tommy Walsh already has a DIY tool range exclusively with Poundland.

Charlie said: "I've been involved with the production and creation of my range, personally testing every item to ensure practicality and quality.

"From gardening gloves and

trowels to watering cans and shears, all at £1, it's affordable for everyone."

She added: "With so many Poundland stores in towns and cities, they are much handier to get to than out-of-town garden centres."

Poundland chief Jim McCarthy said: "Customers

told us they would love to do more gardening, but the cost and sometimes lack of expertise puts them off.

"The introduction of this new range, and with Charlie's expertise, will help encourage more people to take-up gardening which is affordable and enjoyable."

## Novelties kick-start Year of the Cosmos

SEED companies are unveiling new varieties to help gardeners celebrate the Year of the Cosmos during 2016.

Mr Fothergill's, based in Newmarket, will exclusively launch *Cosmos* 'Hummingbird Pink' which is smaller than most cosmos, reaching just 18in (45cm) tall.

This makes it suitable for containers, as well as borders. A packet of seed sufficient for 20 plants costs £2.15. Visit [mr-fothergills.co.uk](http://mr-fothergills.co.uk) for more details.

Thompson & Morgan of Ipswich sold more than 117,000 packets of cosmos across 40 varieties last season, proving that demand is strong for the popular garden plant.

T&M, along with other suppliers, will introduce *Cosmos* 'Xanthos' this spring.

Horticultural director Paul Hansord said: "We're expecting big things from 'Xanthos' during 2016. Yellow is a much sought-after colour in the genus."

T&M is offering 'Xanthos' at £2.49 for 30 seeds or £11.99 for 25 plug plants. The firm will run a 'Cosmos Carnival' campaign this season to promote cosmos to gardeners.

Go to [thompson-morgan.com](http://thompson-morgan.com) to find out more about what's going on.



*Cosmos* 'Xanthos'



*Cosmos* 'Hummingbird Pink'

### A BLOOMIN' GOOD WEEK



#### Gardeners' World fans

The new series of BBC *Gardeners' World*, presented by Monty Don from his Longmeadow garden, starts on Friday 4 March on BBC2.



#### Clifton Hill House

The Heritage Lottery Fund has awarded £35,000 to Clifton Hill House in Bristol, to restore its gardens to their Georgian glory.



#### Confused wildflowers

Over 600 species of wildflower were in bloom at the start of the year when only around 30 should have been flowering at the time.



#### Tough competition

Kingfisher, owner of B&Q, is to invest £500million in stores – after Wesfarmers bought rival chain Homebase for £320million.

### A BLOOMIN' BAD WEEK



## Gardener turfed off over 'messy plot'

**A** GARDENER who tended his allotment as a respite from caring for his sick wife has been kicked off after 25 years – amid claims that his plot was too messy.

Paul Burton, 70, struggled to keep on top of his 300m<sup>2</sup> plot during the wet December. But the grandfather claims it's just an excuse to boot him out, freeing up his plot for a waiting list.

### Disgusted

Paul said: "We had the wettest December on record – sometimes digging just wasn't possible. I'm disgusted. I've been bullied."

Retired Network Rail supervisor Paul had rented his allotment from the Stoke Road Allotment Association in Bletchley, Buckinghamshire, since 1990, at a rate of £19.50 a year. He grew runner beans, peas, potatoes, swedes and blackcurrants.

Paul admitted being sent a letter in November 2014 asking him to clean up his allotment, and said he rotavated his plot. He then received two letters in November and December last year, asking him to tidy up,



Paul Burton said he was unable to tidy-up his allotment due to the wet December



Locked out: Paul

but was hampered by weather.

On 3 January he was given just two weeks to vacate his beloved patch, before being turfed off for good.

Paul said: "I enjoyed it. I have been going for years and it's got a great atmosphere. We all help out. It was a big part of my life."

Lisa Cameron, secretary of the Stoke Road Allotment Association, said Paul's plot was a "hazard to wildlife" because he had metal, wood, plastic and polythene bags

lying around, which could have harmed newts and grass snakes. She said:

"All residents have to adhere to the same rules. The association will not be bullied."

"He was warned about this for months but rather than work his plot, Mr Burton has spent all his energy fighting against the committee. I am aware he feels victimised, but I have had to issue 20 per cent of our plot holders with letters. All bar Mr Burton have actioned the requests."

## Could you create a 'feel good garden' for Hampton Court?

BBC local radio listeners are being invited to compete for a chance to design a garden at the world's largest annual flower show.

England's 39 BBC local radio stations have teamed up with the Royal Horticultural Society to run a challenge that will see successful listeners design 'Feel Good Front Gardens' at the RHS Hampton Court Palace Flower Show on 5-10 July.

### Health and wellbeing

Amateur gardeners and aspiring designers can submit a front garden design (20x13ft/6x4m) that "celebrates their community and highlights the health and wellbeing of gardening". Entrants should tie in a link to their local area, for example, local heritage, buildings, food, people, plants or an aspect of life in their region.

They will not have to fund the "up to £5,000 cost" of creating the gardens.



Four winners will visit RHS Chelsea, where they will meet their mentors: garden designers Ann-Marie Powell and James Alexander-Sinclair.

Hampton Court visitors (pictured) will vote for their favourite garden at the show.

The closing date for entries is noon on 26 February. Go to [bbc.co.uk/localradiogarden](http://bbc.co.uk/localradiogarden) for entry details.

## Brits urged to 'Love our spuds'



A NEW website aims to encourage Brits to grow their own potatoes in gardens and on allotments.

The site, called [thepeoplespotatoes.com](http://thepeoplespotatoes.com), has been set up by spud expert Alan Wilson, a

technical manager at Waitrose who has been growing potatoes for 38 years.

It features his 25 top varieties, video growing tips and a potato quiz. Alan said: "We have become disconnected with the land, and with it our love for the potato has been tarnished."

"This website is about how we can act today and enjoy great potatoes and get eating them again."



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# Ask Christine!

Voted AG's celebrity gardener of the year

Attack vine weevils on several fronts



Wikimedia

## Battling a vine weevil infestation

**Q** My patio garden is infested with vine weevils, and nothing seems to be working against them. I've tried everything - so what else can I do?

**Jo Nunn, Salisbury, Wilts**

**A** Use a combination of methods to get the situation under control. Start by scrubbing out containers to get rid of vine weevil eggs, and use fresh compost.

Adult weevils usually feed in the evenings during spring and summer, and can usually be spotted by torchlight. They tend to drop to the ground if disturbed so might require a bit of hunting out!

Ornamental plants in containers can be treated with acetamiprid (e.g. Bug Clear Ultra Vine Weevil Killer) or thiacloprid (e.g. Bayer Provado Vine

Weevil Killer 2) as a liquid drench applied to the compost. These insecticides give protection against the grubs for up to two and four months respectively, and treatment in summer will control larvae and prevent damage later on.

Neither product can be used on edible plants, or ornamental plants growing in open soil.

Try the nematode worm *Heterorhabditis megidis*, which likes temperatures of 12-20°C/ 54-68°F. Nematodes are safe on all edible and ornamental plants.



Jersey lily bulbs flower once they have matured

Shutterstock

## Why isn't my Jersey lily flowering?

**Q** I bought three Jersey Lily bulbs two years ago, and potted them up as instructed. They have grown beautifully, but not flowered - all I have is a crop of leaves. What do I need to do to make them flower?  
**Sandra Shackcloth (via email)**

**A** The usual reason for Jersey lilies (*Amaryllis belladonna*) failing to flower is that they are too young - bulbs have not matured and you may have to wait another year.

Meanwhile, I am delighted that a wealth of leaves has formed. I think you will find that your plants will perform this season. Blooms appear when the foliage dies back.

Encourage your plants to flower well by feeding them with sulphate of potash at 1oz (28g) per sq m at monthly intervals from April to September. Repeat annually.

This plant also needs a warm, sunny spot in well-drained soil.

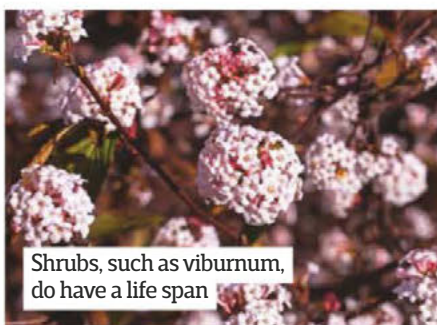
## Have I killed my ancient viburnum?

**Q** My *Viburnum bodnantense*, more than 30 years old, has died on me. Do such species have a life span, or have I done something to kill it?

**Simon Lander (via email)**

**A** The same thing happened to me. I pruned my plant, and it came back in spring, and then died.

I assumed I had killed it by pruning, but when I dug it out I discovered the roots had started to rot away. I hadn't really observed an obvious decline in growth, but the degree of root decay suggested that much of the previous year's growth must have been generated from energy stored in the branches.



Shrubs, such as viburnum, do have a life span

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It is fine for you to plant another Viburnum on the same spot, although I would remove the dead one first. Alternatively, you could use it as a climbing frame for something else!

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**0843 168 0200 (12 to 1pm weekdays)**

\* Calls cost 5p per minute from a BT landline, call costs from other networks may be higher.





## The uses of an over-pruned Leylandii

**Q** My new house has a Leylandii hedge that the previous owners hacked into at one side, so it is no longer growing. Is there anything I can do to hide it, as I can't afford to get rid of it?

**D Evans (via email)**

**A** I would grow climbers through the naked side of the hedge. The plants you choose will depend whether it faces north, south, east or west.

If it is sunny, then honeysuckle, clematis, passionflower, roses and ornamental vines would be suitable.

For a shady aspect, choose ornamental ivies, hops, shade-loving clematis, Japanese honeysuckle, or Virginia creeper.

The hedge will have taken water and nutrients out of the soil, so feed it and keep an eye on dryness.



Honeysuckle grows well in a sunny situation



Peace lilies don't like being over-watered

## How can I save my peace lily?

**Q** The leaves on my peace lily have started to turn black. Will it recover?

**Maureen Turner, Wakefield, Yorkshire**

**A** It sounds as though your lily has been over-watered. The ideal winter temperature is 16-18C (60-65F), and in this environment it will need watering once a week.

Stop watering for at least two weeks, or longer if the temperature is lower, to let the compost dry out. You could replace some of the sodden compost with fresh. Still don't water it though, to give the roots time to recover.

Feed it with a general-purpose liquid fertiliser fortnightly in the spring and summer.



Lacecap hydrangeas are hungry plants

## Concerned about frosted hydrangeas

**Q** My container lacecap hydrangeas have never flowered, and their shoots and leaves are starting to turn brown after a frost. Will they recover?

**Celia Barnes, Rotherham**

**A** If you cut the shoots back to just above a joint, where the tissue is soft and green, stumps will regenerate.

Your plants haven't flowered because they are hungry. Move them into a container 6in (15cm) larger in diameter than the current one. Put 4in (10cm) of John Innes No 3 at the base, nestle in the rootball, and infill with No 3 to within 2in (5cm) of the rim. Then water well.



Apricots are hardy, but flower early in the season

## Advice for growing an apricot tree

**Q** I want to plant an apricot tree in my garden. Do they have any specific requirements for good growth?

**Alan Cresswell (via email)**

**A** What a lovely idea! Apricots are hardy, but flower early-mid spring when there is still a risk of frost, so outdoors cropping isn't always reliable.

The most practical way of growing apricots is as a fan against a south or west-facing wall or fence.

West winds can be strong, but they are not cold, and your tree will do better in a

sunnier spot that helps wood and fruit to ripen. The ideal soil type is well-draining but moisture retentive. It is worth adding compost if you are planting in heavy clay.

Apricot flowers are self-fertile, so you only need one tree to get fruit. However, as it flowers early, there may not be enough pollinating insects around, so it is worth hand-pollinating the flowers using a small paintbrush.

Do this in the middle of a warm day, when the pollen is being shed freely. You may need to do it more than once, as different flowers open at different times.



# Ask Christine!



*Follow Christine's Masterclass on growing tomatoes*



Splitting of fruit (circled, top) is common in plants that have been left to dry out and then watered

Timelife

## How can I avoid a tomato disaster?

**Q** Last year was a disaster for tomatoes. They began well, but the leaves curled and discoloured. A lot of fruit split and rotted at the bottom. They caught blight. How can I prevent this happening again?

**Jay Davidson, Cheam**

**A** You do not mention if you were growing tomatoes in a greenhouse or outdoors, so I will offer general advice.

Regarding leaf discoloration, it may have been a virus, contamination of the soil, a lack of feeding, a mineral deficiency or cold temperatures early in the season.

As your plants went on to fruit, this suggests that it was a cultural problem rather than a soil contamination issue. Regular feeding with tomato fertiliser will help to prevent mineral deficiencies.

But magnesium deficiency can be induced by using too much fertiliser that is rich in potash, such as a tomato fertiliser. It is not uncommon to see both magnesium and calcium deficiency on the same plant, so this may have caused the discoloration.

It would have appeared as yellowing between the leaf veins, first on older leaves and then on younger ones.

Curling of tomato plant leaves in the absence of obvious damage or stress is quite normal on outdoor tomatoes. So I'm willing to bet that a mineral deficiency may have caused your problem.

Splitting of fruit is common in plants that have been allowed to become too dry and then watered again. If plants completely dry out, and are later watered, splits in the skin of fruit are often observed.

With regard to blight, there are blight-resistant tomatoes on the market, widely available from seed and plant suppliers, so give them a try. In my experience to date, they can still go down with blight, but not as quickly or to the same extent as non blight-resistant varieties.

## Christine's top tomato tips



Wikimedia

### ■ Plan crops carefully

Blight breaks out in specific weather conditions – normally during damp growing seasons. It's the same disease that causes blight on potatoes, so growing the two crops next to each other is not regarded as a good idea.



### ■ Grow toms under glass

Outdoor tomatoes are much more susceptible to blight than varieties that are grown in glasshouses. Although it's not uncommon to see blight under glass, a greenhouse offers a degree of extra protection from the airborne spores.

## Prevent blossom end rot

Your comments about fruit rotting sound like blossom-end rot (right). It's a calcium deficiency, brought on by lack of water movement in the plant and irregular watering. Keeping the plants just moist and never letting them dry out can prevent this problem. If you grow tomatoes outside on light, sandy or acidic soil, incorporating plenty of well-rotted organic matter will help the soil to retain moisture.



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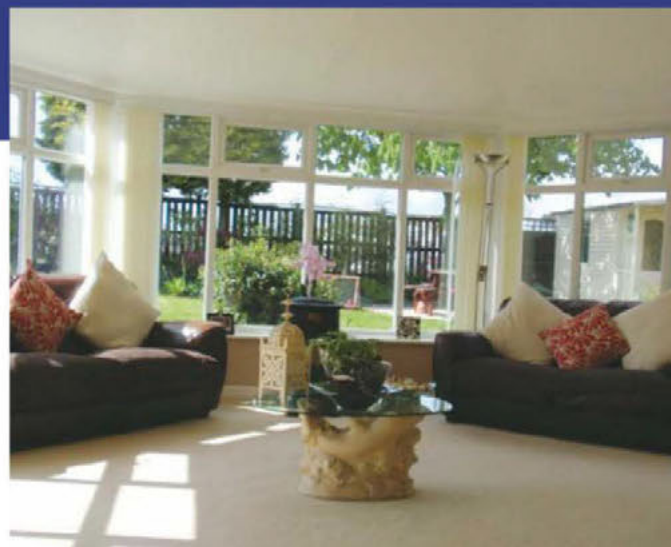
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ROAG16-09BRP01	10 Narcissus pseudonarcissus (in the green)	£15.00		
ROAG16-09BRP02	25 Narcissus pseudonarcissus (in the green) – SAVE £12.50	£25.00		
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	50 Anemone blanda Mix bulbs FREE WITH EVERY ORDER	FREE	1 [ ] TICK	£5.99 POSTAGE
Total			£	

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20 FEBRUARY 2016 / ROAG16-09



# Tried & tested



We try before you buy

## Fleece jackets

Grab a fleece and head outside, Consumer editor **Julia Heaton** has the low-down on six different styles to keep you warm

**A** FLEECE should be light, durable and retain warmth if it's to work as the ultimate insulating layer of clothing.

We've tested six ladies fleeces of various weights, all with a full-length zip for slipping on and off easily, and in a range of colours. Mens sizes are available in each.

We tested during a cold spell this January, looking for the obvious warmth factor and whether they moved fluidly and

were comfortable to wear.

Made from 100% polyester all garments were washed following manufacturers' instructions for a warm and gentle cycle. On a 30 °C 'synthetic' wash without conditioner two ('Cathie II' and the 'Isle') stayed the same. Three ('Heritage Fleece', 'Nevis', 'Magnolia Soft Knit') were 1-2cm shorter and the 'Willowbrook' from Regatta stretched to 3cm longer in the arm.



Humphries



Score  
12/15

### Heritage fleece

£70 RRP

[sprayway.com](http://sprayway.com)  
for stockist finder

#### Features ★★★★★

This smart fleece jacket in fig has a 'knit' effect exterior and a micro fleece lined collar. Two zipped pockets and a chunky zip complete the look. Ladies sizes 8-20 are also available in blue. Mens version comes in grey. No hood.

#### Performance ★★★★★

Felt well made and didn't restrict movement in the arms. Had the smoothest zip, and the neckline was generous when zipped right up. Its heavier weight felt snug and protected from the cold.

#### Value ★★★★★

Overall, a good jacket but the extra outlay doesn't appear to give added value over some of the other fleeces.



Score  
13/15

### Nevis Fur-Lined Hoodie

£24.99 +p&p £4.50 or free click and collect

[020 3828 7700](tel:02038287700)  
[mountainwarehouse.com](http://mountainwarehouse.com)

#### Features ★★★★★

Dark Teal with soft, cream coloured pile interior and close-knit exterior. Fur-lined hood and zipped pockets. Sizes 8-12 also in grey; or mens version ('Glen') comes in navy and charcoal.

#### Performance ★★★★★

Heaviest weight fleece that felt really warm and cosy, yet easy to move around in. Was also generous enough to wear another layer underneath. Its thickness kept the wind out and even shrugged off fine rain. The cream-coloured lining however is not that practical.

#### Value ★★★★★

Very comfortable with roomy pockets. It's fur lining made all the difference.



Score  
11/15

### Willowbrook Coral Blush

£60 +p&p £3.95

[0161 866 0486](tel:01618660486)  
[regatta.com](http://regatta.com)

#### Features ★★★★★

Lightweight 'knit' finish with stretchy underarm, side panels and hood built into the collar, elastic hem and cuffs. Storm-proof zip, zipped pockets and zipped sleeve pocket. Sizes 12-20, also in black, blue and aqua. Mens ('Collumbus II') in black, orange and green.

#### Performance ★★★★★

Good stretchy material that was close-fitting, practically weightless and the best for movement. But it was also the least insulating so more useful in the warmer months, or worn as an extra layer.

#### Value ★★★★★

Attractive stretchy, sporty jacket. Other colours reduced on the website.



**Next week: Get ready for spring with our choice of pushalong seed and fertiliser spreaders**

## Cathie II

**£30** +p&p £3.95

☎ **0161 866 0486** 🌐 [regatta.com](http://regatta.com)

### Features ★★★★★

Mid-weight fleece with anti-pill finish, two roomy zip fastened pockets and adjustable cord hem. Sizes 8-26, also in a range of colours. Mens ('Stanton II') available in seven colours.

### Performance ★★★★★

Generous proportions and cord tightening provided the cosiest feel, yet didn't restrict movement. The soft hand-warmer pockets were an added bonus and the long cut back didn't ride up during gardening. Didn't bobble up after washing either.

### Value ★★★★★

Versatile for year-round use and a good price.

**Amateur Gardening**  
**Best buy!**  
**14/15**



## Man's best friend

Dogs love the garden, so here's some hound-friendly gear that'll keep the both of you happy

### Dog Rocks

**£12.49**

☎ **01628 822 243**  
🌐 [dogrocks.co.uk](http://dogrocks.co.uk)

Burnt patches where you dog urinates on the lawn are always a bone of contention. Simply place a pack of Dog Rocks in your pooch's water bowl, sit back and wait to see an improvement (in about 5 weeks).



### Get Off Lawn Rescue

**£6** in store or +  
£4.95 delivery

☎ **0800 325 4204**  
🌐 [petsathome.com](http://petsathome.com)

Simply spray to neutralize the acid damage caused by pet urine on lawns. Includes natural growth promoters and nutrients for faster re-growth.



### Westland Aftercut Patch Fix

**£6.99** TSP

☎ **01480 443789**  
🌐 [gardenhealth.com](http://gardenhealth.com)  
for stockists

Pet urine-resistant grass seed in a soil blend including lawn feed and a urine neutraliser, you'll need this for patches where you pooch has already done their worst.



Score  
**13/15**

### Isle Microfleece

**£12** +p&p £3.99

☎ **0808 202 0242** store finder  
🌐 [ewm.co.uk](http://ewm.co.uk) online shop

### Features ★★★★★

Lightweight fleece, with small side pockets and high neck, sizes: S, M, L, XL, in coral, cream or green. Mens ('One Valley') available in black, red and blue.

### Performance ★★★★★

Lightweight and allowed a good amount of movement. Although it wasn't as thick as the Regatta 'Cathie II', it was surprisingly warm and very cosy around the neck when zipped up. The arms were shorter than others, which may be a blessing for some people, and a machine wash did not alter its size.

### Value ★★★★★

Such a good price you wouldn't worry about getting it dirty.



Score  
**11/15**

### Magnolia Soft Knit

**£50**

☎ **01242 539535**  
🌐 [weirdfish.co.uk](http://weirdfish.co.uk)

### Features ★★★★★

Lightweight fleece with a knit-effect finish, it has a hood with a pretty patterned fabric lining, small slit pockets. Available in sizes 8-20 in port, light cream and cantaloupe. Mens ('Belze') comes in black.

### Performance ★★★★★

Quite a close-fitting garment and the hood gave that extra bit of comfort. Not as stretchy as some so more for garden visiting than gardening. Like the 'Nevis' fleece, it shrugged off rain well and the material didn't show marks.

### Value ★★★★★

Good all-rounder and versatile enough to be worn in winter or summer, but the pockets weren't so practical for gardeners.

All prices correct at time of going to press and may vary at garden centres



'Goldstar' is a favourite among show growers like Charles Massey for its size and flavour. "Always grow for flavour!" says Charles



Charles cuts the top out of his cordoned tomatoes once they reach the roof of his glasshouse



# Grow the tastiest tomatoes

Welsh grower Charles Maisey has been growing tomatoes for over 60 years. He shares his advice with **Sue Bradley**

**H**E'S been described as "the master" by no less than the president of the National Vegetable Society Medwyn Williams MBE, and was the man to whom Joe Swift turned when he wanted advice on exhibiting crops at a top RHS show.

When it comes to growing tomatoes, it's hard to imagine anybody doing it better than Charles Maisey.

Now 83, Charles has scaled down his exhibiting activities but still fills two large glasshouses with tomato plants every year.

"I've been growing tomatoes for more than 60 years and pretty much won every competition," laughs Charles, who began his life in horticulture as a 17-year-old apprentice at a nursery.

"Over the years I've had a lovely time gardening and met some fantastic people.

"Unfortunately I've seen my best days and would like to pass on what I've learned."

## Charles's tomato growing secrets

Charles's tomato year starts at the end of January, when he sows the first of his seeds for the year ahead, bringing them on in small pots in an electric propagator heated to between 13°C and 16°C (55°F to 60°F).

"I'll put in some more seeds about a month later so that I don't get all my tomatoes at once. I start picking towards the end of June."

Once they're big enough, Charles transfers his seedlings to three inch (8cm) pots of compost and then on to five inch (13cm) containers before planting them out into their final growing positions in his heated greenhouse when they're 6in (15cm) high.

"I pot them on twice to get good, sturdy roots," he explains.

Another key to Charles's success is the meticulous care he takes over the depth and quality of the soil he uses in his greenhouse.

He starts by filling a trench with nine inches (23cm) to one foot (30cm) of well-rotted farmyard or horse manure.

Onto this he places a growing bag into which a large slit is cut on the underside to allow the roots of the tomatoes to travel.

Planting rings made from florists' buckets with the bottoms cut out are pushed into holes in the tops of the bags and filled with a high nutrient compost: Charles uses a mix of peat and loam-based products as he's found peat dries out quite quickly, and he's careful

---

## "I would like to pass onto others what I've learned"

---

to top up the compost as the plant grows.

Experience has taught Charles to space out his tomatoes (no more than two plants per grow bag) to ensure they receive adequate air flow as this reduces the risk of diseases such as botrytis (grey mould) and blight.

Watering takes place every three days, or more frequently if it's exceptionally hot.

Once the plants are established, Charles wets the manure layer under the growing bags rather than watering the base of the stem.

Feeding starts after the first truss of tomatoes are about the size of a pea, with a high potassium feed that's given at half strength every time he waters his plants.

After a month Charles adds three further feeds to his regimen: solutions of nettles, sheep manure and soot, all of which are made in large barrels in his garden.

"I feed these one after another through a small flower pot sunk into the top of the growing bag, and then start again."

Charles has grown all kinds of vegetables successfully, including runner beans, for which he won six consecutive national titles. He was also the national champion for potatoes three times, but says tomatoes are always the top of the crops in his eyes.

"I could eat them every day: they're very good for you," he laughs. ▶

Top tips

## Getting started

### Greenhouse

Tomatoes and cucumbers are best grown separately: tomatoes like dry conditions while cucumbers need a more humid environment.



### Temperature

Charles swears by his anthracite boilers for keeping his glasshouses free from winter chills. He fires them up from March.



### Pest control

Charles swears by *Coleus canina*, a member of the mint family that is often marketed as Scaredy Cat Plant, for deterring pests like white fly.



### Watering

Bring watering cans into the greenhouse so that the water inside them isn't ice cold when it reaches the soil. Spray seeds with tepid water, too.



### Pinching out

Pinch out the side shoots that appear just above the leaves on cordon tomato plants, so that all the goodness goes into the developing fruit.



## 'Goldstar' tomatoes

■ Charles Maisey has made a DVD about growing tomatoes.

To order a copy visit:

■ [nvsuk.org.uk/dvds](http://nvsuk.org.uk/dvds)

■ The 'Goldstar' variety of tomatoes that Charles favours can be purchased from Medwyn's of Anglesey.

Visit: [medwynsofanglesey.co.uk](http://medwynsofanglesey.co.uk)





**AG recommends:**

## 6 tasty cordon tomatoes to try



### 'Shirley'

Said to be one of the nicest flavoured and textured tomatoes and a heavy cropper to boot. An old favourite.

**Supplier:** Marshalls ☎ 0844 557 6700



### 'Artisan Tiger Stripe'

As beautiful as they are delicious, this is a mix of striped tomatoes that will add a special touch to a salad bowl.

**Supplier:** Marshalls ☎ 0844 557 6700



### 'Capriccio'

A mini plum tomato with a flavour to rival traditional cherry varieties. More than average flowering trusses per plant.

**Supplier:** T&M: ☎ 0844 573 1818



### 'Mountain Magic'

A rich flavour combined with modern disease resistance makes this variety especially good in areas plagued by blight.

**Supplier:** Kings Seeds: ☎ 01376 570 000



### 'Akron'

A heavy weight tomato that was a top performer in trials at RHS Wisley. Kept cropping well into late autumn.

**Supplier:** T&M: ☎ 0844 573 1818



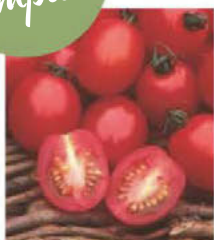
### Black Opal

Combines the unusual dark skin and health benefits of 'Black Cherry' with the high sugar content of 'Sweet Aperitif'.

**Supplier:** T&M: ☎ 0844 573 1818

Easy & compact

## 3 sweet and juicy bush tomatoes



### 'Apero'

A good looking and tasty cherry tomato. A regular variety on show benches and a supermarket favourite.

**Supplier:** Suttons: ☎ 0844 326 2200



### 'Vilma'

Specially bred for growing in containers. Produces a heavy crop of cherry tomatoes over a long picking period.

**Supplier:** T&M: ☎ 0844 573 1818



### 'Tumbling Tom'

Produces abundant early crops of yellow – or red – sweet and juicy cherry tomatoes throughout summer.

**Supplier:** T&M: ☎ 0844 573 1818



# DREAMY DAHLIAS FOR YOUR GARDEN AND VASE



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Miss Sophie



Eveline



- ✓ Includes the exclusive, pale pink cactus dahlia 'Miss Sophie'
- ✓ Flowers continuously from July through to November
- ✓ Height 120-150cm/4-5ft
- ✓ Top-quality, field-grown tubers supplied from mid March 2016 and full instructions included

## Easy dahlia displays with this collection of beautiful blooms.

Enjoy harmonious displays of plentiful summer blooms for both cutting and border. These plump dahlias are delicately blushed in shades of pink and violet, and these shifting pastel tones create a beautiful, fluid and serene display. The contrasting cactus and decorative flower forms work well together to create a well-balanced display in both the garden and the vase.

Dahlias are so easy to grow and so prolific, making them easily one of the most rewarding and worthwhile of our summer plants. With this tried and tested collection you can be sure of blooms which flower simultaneously and last well together in both border and vase.

The key to unrivalled summer long displays is simply to keep picking. Hand-graded and picked tubers are supplied from mid-March for potting on, although we find that planting direct into a sunny border once the frosts have passed gives better results. Half hardy, perennial.

### THE BLUSHING CLOUD DAHLIA COLLECTION

3 tubers, one of each – £9.95 **code 49478**

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6 tubers, two of each – £14.90 **code 49571**

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## Fuchsia devastation

**I** DON'T know if other AG readers have suffered in the same way as me, but the fuchsias in my garden in south London have been devastated by Fuschia Gall Mite.

They're one of my favourite plants as they bring such brilliant colours to the garden from mid summer right up to the first frosts. Every time I went to a garden show I couldn't resist buying a new plant.

Then last year I found new buds on my fuchsias were being horribly distorted, and I found out from the RHS that it was the dreaded microscopic mite.

According to their experts, there's no known pesticide available to get rid of it, but a very cold winter might possibly kill it. If not, they said I should destroy all my fuchsias, something I can't bear to do!

Apparently the mite's presence was first



discovered in Brazil, then it spread to California and on to Europe, reaching these shores in 2007.

**Anthony Ogg, London**



Star letter

## Take a gander at this!

I SAW this sick or injured dove lying on my lawn.

By the time I went outside, it had crawled over to my goose statue and settled down next to it.

The goose looks quite fierce so I think it felt safer there!

**Lesley Hayter, Boston, Lincs**

Digi pic of the week



## A tale of many tits

WINTER finally showed up in mid-January and for some of us, our first covering of snow. With it came my absolute favourite garden visitors, Long-tailed tits, looking for a tasty meal. I do sometimes see them in pairs throughout the warmer months when they're nest building, but outside the breeding season they tend to gather in groups.

It's so lovely to hear their constant chattering to each other as they flit from tree to tree and really bring cheer to a wintery day.

By the way, do any AG readers know the collective noun for Long-tailed tits? I've tried googling it but have drawn a blank.

If there isn't one, my choice would be 'a delight', 'a relish' or 'a revel'. I'm sure you can see where I'm going with this!

**Margaret Kovrlja, Fairburn, Nottinghamley**

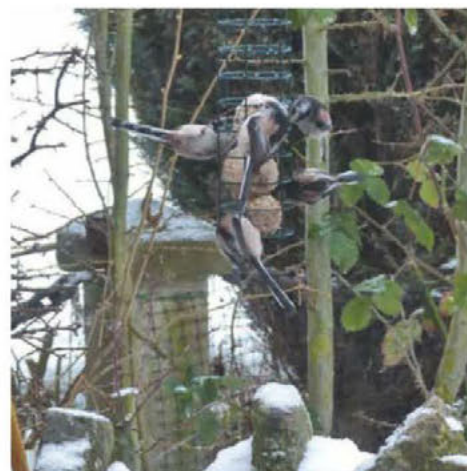
## Fingers crossed

FOR years I have tried, to no avail, to get my wife interested in gardening, both at home and on an allotment. But my two sons TJ and Franky managed to do it in one day.

This is a picture of them planting their first plant, a buddleia, in our family garden. They went on to plant out some lillies, tulips and alliums after that too. Hopefully once my wife sees them in bloom it may do the trick.

**Tony Davies-musker, Liverpool**

**Jenny says...** With luck your sons' enjoyment will keep your wife engaged. Getting children interested at a young age is a great idea, as Peter Seabrook will tell you!







Our Star Letter wins £40 in National Garden Gift Vouchers; tip of the week, £10; other letters £5 (£10 if we use a photo you've sent).



Vouchers can be bought and redeemed at over 2,000 UK outlets offering more than 90,000 garden plants and products. Visit [thevoucher.garden.co.uk](http://thevoucher.garden.co.uk) for details.

## Ear, ear Tim

JUST a quick note to say that Tim's noisy pigeon problem (The Editor's Letter AG 23 Jan issue) can easily be solved, along with any other noise issues (traffic, wind, rain etc) by using ear plugs. They're also a must when staying in hotels and you can buy them in most large high street chemists.

**Ken Higham, Hambleton, Lancs**

**Tim says...** Not a bad idea – but if I tried stuffing them in Kath's ears she'd be thrashing me, not the wisteria!



## Sweet success

THESE cat litter trays from Poundland are perfect for the sweet peas I started off on New Year's Day in my mini greenhouse.

They were planted in biodegradable cardboard tubes that I picked up in my local garden centre for £2.99, so it continues the thrifty theme.

I had to give up the battle with our hamsters for the toilet roll tubes!

**Stuart Fairway, Hailsham, East Sussex**

## Readers Quick Tips



FOR some time my wife has been using plastic bottle tops for lightweight drainage in pots and tubs. Recently she asked me if I could fasten some to the bottom of her new plastic troughs, so I thought about it for a while and decided that using pot rivets would be the best way to achieve this.

As you can see it's very successful. Raising the trough this way aids drainage and doesn't hinder its stability like pot feet can.

The plastic bottles they came from weren't thrown away either, as they were sunk into the soil by the side of plants to assist with watering directly to the roots.

**Terry Parker, Bicester, Oxon**

## Buy now or later?

I VISITED RHS Wisley on 31 January to see the snowdrops and some winter colour to cheer up my grey January soul.

Whilst there I visited the garden centre only to see lots of bulbs and tubers for sale. There was a lovely choice of dahlias, but I stopped and thought, surely it's far too early to plant dahlias in early February. And I was right as on the packaging it said 'for early flowers plant in April'. So do I buy now as there's a good choice, or wait until April when there won't be many left and those that are will be dried out?

There were also nerines and begonias and lots of other bulbs too. Surely it's the job of the plants people to overwinter the bulbs and corms, not mine.

So many people are going to buy them now, only to be disappointed as it's the wrong time to plant. And certainly RHS Wisley should know better!

**Mrs Monica Cook, Staines, Middlesex**

**Jenny says...** Buy early for the best choice, plant them in a pot and keep frost-free and in good light until April.



## Watch the birdie!

MY cat Ellie is a bit of a twitcher and watches birds from the bathroom window.

However, she clearly wasn't fooled for a minute by the kingfisher image that I'd stuck to the pane of glass!

**Charlotte Primrose, Manningtree, Essex**

## Amateur Gardening Meet the team!

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- Return flights, taxes & transfers
- Seven nights' four-star accommodation, with breakfast and four evening meals
- Guided tour of Rome, Siena, Florence and Arezzo
- Visit to the Uffizi art gallery and Assisi, and discover the Tuscan countryside
- Escorted by an experienced tour manager

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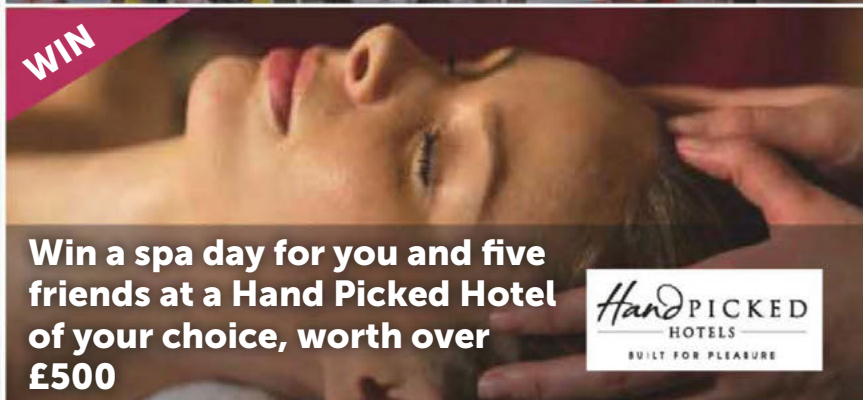


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Robins are so familiar – and welcome – in our gardens. Put out small peanut pieces, fat cakes and large seeds for them

# What you can do now to help Garden wildlife

It's been such a mild winter, our garden wildlife is confused, says the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB)

**I**T'S been a funny old winter, hasn't it? In December and early January there were some days in certain parts of the UK that felt more like early autumn!

Since then most of us have had the odd cold snap, and certainly a great deal of wind and rain – even thunder and hailstones!

Garden wildlife would have been grateful for any extra help you gave them over winter, and if you can continue your efforts this month it will help them gear up for their most active time of year.

February is often the chilliest month, but with the mild winter we've been having, it's likely that wildlife will spring into action

earlier than usual. There could well be the early emergence of butterflies and bees, and toads and frogs may even start to spawn too, so keep an eye on your ponds!

## Feed the birds

Birds of all shapes and sizes, wherever you live, will be hungry this month. Mild or not, berry and insect supplies will have been all but exhausted by now, so the food we put out will be essential.

Stock your feeders with nutritious treats and you could see all kinds of species, including exotic visitors like bramblings, redwings and fieldfares. Small seeds, such as

millet, will attract the likes of house sparrows, dunnocks and finches.

Tits and greenfinches favour peanuts and sunflower seeds. Blackbirds like flaked maize, but in general, most birds will give everything a try when they're hungry.

You could also donate some kitchen leftovers to our feathered friends – apples, pears, porridge oats, grated cheese and cooked rice and pastry will provide that all-important energy boost.

February is the month when lots of birds will be scoping out potential nest sites for the breeding season, which typically starts in April. So, if you were given a nest box for Christmas, or have one in the garage that you've been meaning to put up – now is the time!

Nestboxes are excellent substitutes for





Early spring plants to entice bees include: heather, pulmonaria, hellebores and *Ribes sanguineum*

Dave Bevan / Wikimedia (main)



Frogs are active now with their mating rituals. Watch out for the clumps of spawn floating on pond surfaces

natural nest sites, which are increasingly hard to find. The RSPB advises that you avoid hanging your box in areas exposed to hot mid-day sun, or wet winds.

Birds will need a clear flight path to their nest, without clutter in front of the entrance. If birds don't take to your box in the first season, don't despair. Follow this advice and it will be occupied sooner or later!

Although they are not always seen to be quite as attractive as birds, you can do your bit to attract insects this month, too.

Ladybirds and lacewings in particular are ferocious predators of aphids and other

garden pests, so they are some of the gardeners' best friends! Avoid clearing away dead vegetation in autumn and winter, as they will use this as shelter.

If you'd like to attract bumblebees, plant nectar-rich shrubs and herbaceous plants. In spring the best bets are fruit trees, native primroses, pulmonaria and spring bulbs.

Hedgehogs naturally wake a few times during hibernation, but fluctuating temperatures waking them more often burns energy at a time where natural food is scarce, so replacing their lost fat is often not possible. Turn the page to discover how you can keep hedgehogs healthy and happy for the remainder of winter. ►

# Nestboxes

Provide a safe place for birds to roost and nest. Boxes are designed with the right dimensions and ventilation for birds, and only non-toxic preservatives are used on the wood. They should not have decorations that predators can cling to.

## Open-fronted boxes

Perfect for robins (also pied wagtails and spotted flycatchers). Robins like to nest in thick, overhanging vegetation, so an ideal site for a box might be attached to a fence, which has got climbing plants such as ivy growing up it.



RSPB

## Small round entrances

Boxes with small round holes 1in (25mm) across are suitable for blue, coal and marsh tits; tree sparrows and great tits like holes a touch bigger; and nuthatches, pied flycatchers and house sparrows like them 1½in (32mm) across.



RSPB

## Larger boxes and entrances

Tawny and barn owls, kestrels, jackdaws and stock doves need larger boxes and very large holes. Boxes need to be sited at least 8ft (2.5m) above the ground; and there needs to be a clear flight path in and out of the box.



Wikimedia

**“You can do your bit to attract insects this month, too”**



# Keep hedgehogs happy

Fay Vass, Chief Executive of the British Hedgehog Preservation Society, looks at how to keep our hogs healthy



BHPS

## Mild winter

In a mild, unpredictable winter like the one we're experiencing hedgehogs are confused. Many won't have started hibernating until the new year, and they may not have put on enough weight to see them through to mid-March.

**DID YOU KNOW?** If the temperature is greater than 4 or 5°C (39/41°F), the animal's metabolism begins to increase, which burns precious fats. A hedgehog hibernating at 15°C (59°F) will use double the energy a hedgehog hibernating at 5°C (41°F) will.



Timelinc

## Replacing lost fat

If you see a hedgehog out in the daylight at this time of year, or one that looks poorly or small, you should collect it up in a high sided box with an old towel in the bottom and bring it indoors, offering meaty pet food or hedgehog food, and water.

**TOP ADVICE:** Once rescued hogs are safe indoors, give British Hedgehog Preservation Society (BHPS) a call for advice and local contacts. Offering hedgehogs food in the wild is good, along with some dry straw for bedding.



WG

## A dry home

Flooding, as many of us have had this year, poses a risk to hedgehogs too.

They can drown in their nests and even if they do escape, there is nowhere dry to build a new nest, nor dry materials, and there will be a distinct lack of natural food.

**NEW HOMES:** Plans for making a hedgehog house can be found on the BHPS website or you can buy a number of proprietary hog homes on the market. (Pictured is the Hoggy Home from Wiggly Wiggles).

**Try it!**

## 4 ways to help wildlife



The urban wildlife gardener

**1** Make a simple pond, in under an hour, by filling a watertight container (like a metal dustbin). Seal any holes with silicone. Fill with water and aquatic plants to attract insects and dragonflies.



Wikimedia

**2** Plant a range of nectar-rich plants (such as alyssum, sedum and ivy) to attract butterflies and bees. Bees are dramatically declining in numbers, so we need to do what we can to help them.



Timelinc

**3** One of the things we can easily do is to make a 'hotel' for solitary bees. The equivalent of bird boxes, these are made by packing cut bamboo canes, straws and hollow plant stems into a wooden box.



Timelinc

**4** In an out-of-the-way corner, pile some old rocks or logs together, and leave them with lots of gaps and holes. It will be a safe haven for insects, as well as frogs, toads and newts.

## For more information

**British Hedgehog Preservation Society**  
 ☎ 01584 890 801,  
 🌐 britishhedgehogs.org.uk

**Wiggly Wiggles**  
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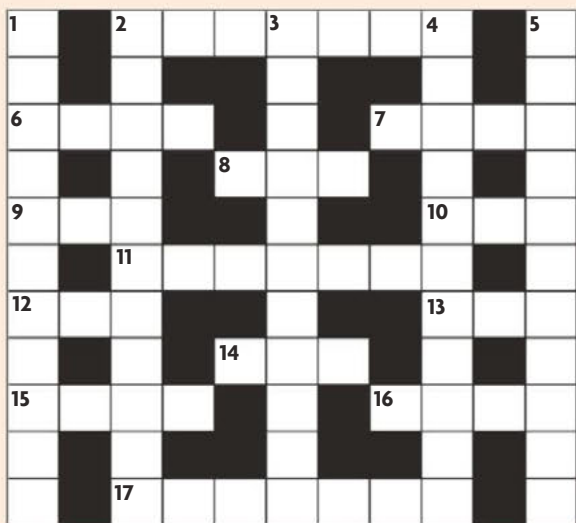
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## Crossword ...just for fun!

### ACROSS

**2** Part new, this is a province of Flanders, Belgium (7) (anag)

**6** Constance \_\_\_\_ (1886 – 1960) was, amongst many achievements, a famous British florist (4)

**7** *Love Your Garden* (ITV) host, Mr Titchmarsh (4)

**8** Put flowers in one to grow, or yourself in one to sleep (3)

**9** Ornate vase for the patio perhaps (3)

**10** Botanically speaking, a daisy flower is a “\_\_\_ floret” (3)

**11** Any of several plants, of the genus *panax*, having forked roots supposed to have medicinal properties (7)

**12** Anyone wielding sharp tools is advised to wear boots with steel \_\_\_ caps! (3)

**13** An essential one is used to make perfumes and flavourings, especially having the characteristic

odour of the plant from which it is obtained (3)

**14** Hard substratum of soil, says Peter! (3)

**15** The gorse genus (4)

**16** The range of the eye, as in a large garden, perhaps, as well as the variety of daylily: ‘Inner \_\_\_\_’ (4)

**17** Space for a hybrid rose? Or a place to get a cuppa? (3,4)

### DOWN

**1** Orange-flowered trailing or climbing annuals, often favoured by blackfly (11)

**2** Indoor display of flowers perhaps (11)

**3** Long-legged aquatic insect that skims about on the surface of a pond (5,6)

**4** Correct name for the bedding geranium (11)

**5** Common name for the evergreen perennial/shrub *Melianthus major*, amongst others (5,6)

**CROSSWORD ANSWERS**  
ACROSS 2 Antwerp 6 Spay 7 Alan 8 Bed 9 Um 10 Ray 11 Ginseng 12 Toe 13 Oil  
DOWN 1 Nasturtiums 2 Arrangement 3 Water skater 4 Pelargonium  
5 Honey flower

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## Wordsearch

This word search comprises plant names and gardening terms beginning with the letter ‘D’. They are listed below; in the grid they may be read across, backwards, up, down or diagonally. Letters may be shared between words. Erroneous or duplicate words may appear in the grid, but there is only one correct solution. After the listed words are found there are nine letters remaining; arrange these to make this week’s KEYWORD.

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DANAE  
DANDELION  
DAPHNE  
DATURA  
DEUTZIA  
DIANTHUS  
DICENTRA  
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S	A	R	U	T	A	D	D	A	S
U	U	N	T	D	I	E	N	I	I
N	D	H	D	N	R	A	R	Z	L
M	A	A	T	E	E	U	V	T	A
A	H	I	I	N	L	C	P	U	T
T	L	L	H	S	A	I	I	E	I
C	I	P	L	A	Y	I	O	D	G
I	A	R	E	S	O	R	D	N	I
D	M	U	C	I	N	O	R	O	D

**HOW TO ENTER:** Fill in this week’s keyword on the entry form, and send it to AG Word Search No 301, *Amateur Gardening*, Westover House, West Quay Road, Poole, Dorset BH15 1JG, to arrive by Weds 2 March, 2016. The first correct entry chosen at random will win our £30 cash prize.

No:  
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# Plant focus

*It's a great time to plant this shrub*

## Grow Daphne odora 'Aureomarginata'

This easy-to-grow daphne will fill the late winter garden with a sweet, lily-like fragrance

### Why grow it?

Because it is one of the most heavenly scented shrubs you'll ever plant. This little evergreen, whose glossy leaves are prettily outlined with a creamy silvery edging, has tiny deep pink flowers that pack a powerfully fragrant punch out of all proportion to their dainty size. You'll notice the bud clusters forming in late January, ready to scent the cold air as winter gives way to early spring. This is one of the smaller daphnes and certainly the earliest to flower. It takes a long time to grow steadily to its maximum height of 3-4ft (1 to 1.3m). A few sprigs brought into the house are better than any scented candle or diffuser.

### How to grow it

Don't crowd your daphne out, but give it space in a woodland area where it will enjoy the well-drained humus-rich soil. It is equally happy in an acidic or alkaline soil but a heavy clay that suffers from winter wet will see it sulking and refusing to flower. Light shade is fine and if you have the right conditions alongside a path, or underneath a window, you will enjoy it all the more. It needs little or no pruning – cutting a few flowers is quite enough.

### Looks good with...

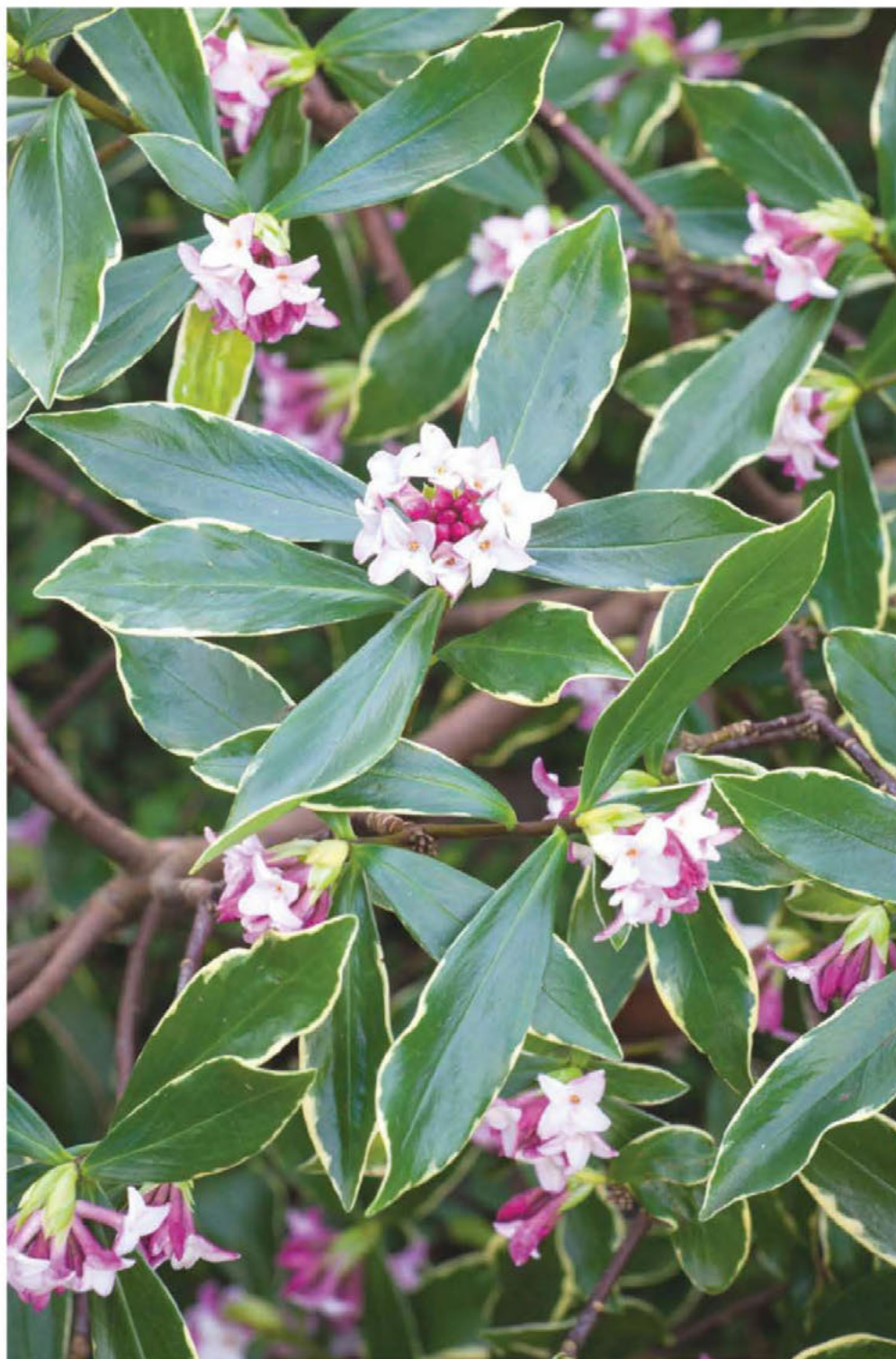
Grow with other scented shrubs such as *Stachyurus praecox* or *Sarcococca*, the Christmas Box, and underplant with scillas, small daffodils and *Muscari 'Valerie Finnis'*.

### Where to buy:

Available from most good nurseries and garden centres or try:

Dulford Nurseries; ☎ 01884 266361;  
🌐 [dulford-nurseries.co.uk](http://dulford-nurseries.co.uk)

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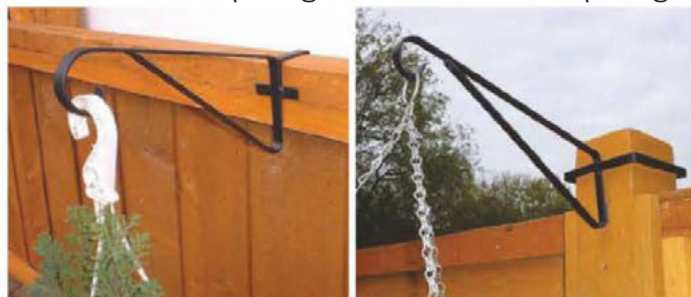
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# Get the look

## Ideas for gorgeous gardens

Richard's metal sculptures and green roof-topped studio are complemented by Jo's creative use of colour in the garden. A selection of his pieces on the patio include the firebowl, originally a hemisphere, made for the Jackstar Sculpture at Tipner Lake near Portsmouth



# Using sculptures in the garden

Artistry and planting come together in perfect harmony in the quirky Hampshire garden created by Jo Carter and Richard Farrington

**J**O Carter doesn't turn a hair when husband Richard brings his work home and leaves it in the garden. And if it's there for a while it's more than likely to end up with plants growing through it, which is just what he likes to see.

Fortunately none of the items have been the full-size versions of the metal sculptures Richard creates, many of which are now landmarks throughout the UK – amongst them the 20ft (6m) high cricket stumps at Hampshire cricket ground and the charm bracelet overlooking the bay at Hunt's Cliff on the Cleveland coast. Instead the pieces are smaller creations, including scale 'maquettes' (sculptor's models) of his larger designs.

"We have things from the beginning of Richard's career 30 years ago to new pieces

---

**"It's functional and relaxing – a place we both really enjoy"**

---

that he brings back for us to talk about," Jo explains. "They've all become part of the garden." That's not to say that all this creativity is one-sided: Jo studied fine art sculpture herself before becoming interested in gardening and garden design and brings her own artistic flair to her family's plot in Alton.

Their 1940's property has been home for 17

years, although the almost square back garden was an entirely different prospect when they moved in. "It consisted of grass, brambles, two gnarled apple trees and a scattering of LPs," Jo recalls.

Today it's a sophisticated space for entertaining family and friends, a showcase for Richard's work, the location of his studio and a home for a huge variety of plants. "I'm always putting new things in," Jo admits. "Quite a lot of plants are chosen for their foliage. I like bringing different shapes together and am very drawn to quite large scale things, which I think is always fun in a small space. It plays on scale quite nicely.

"I'm quite happy with how it is now," Jo concludes. It's functional and relaxing – a place we both really enjoy."



A bamboo frame covered in *Clematis* 'Princess Diana' and 'Madame Julia Correvon' is a cheap and simple way to divide a garden into rooms



Have little surprises tucked away to be discovered. Here *Dahlia* 'Blackberry Ripple' grows through a maquette of Richard's sculpture 'Pi'

Words by Sue Bradley photography by Peter Chatterton



Use every surface – here attention is drawn away from a water butt to the collection of plants on top

Add an extra layer of plants with a shelf. "It allows me to bring everything out from the conservatory," says Jo



Recycle old tins as plant containers



Start a collection and use an area of garden as a backdrop for an exhibition. Richard's studio is a canvas for sculptures and found objects

## Meet the owners

**OWNER** Jo Carter and Richard Farrington

**ADDRESS** 42 Whitedown, Alton, GU34 1LU

**GARDEN SIZE** 40ft by 30ft

**ASPECT** SE facing

**SOIL** Clay loam – former hop field

**VISITED** August

**SPECIAL FEATURES** Artistic garden featuring sculptures and creative use of colourful plants.





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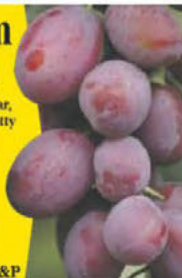
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Apple trees can live for over 200 years

## Apple rescue plan

**Toby** helps to save a tree that's fallen victim to winter storms

**T**HERE'S an apple tree that I've inherited on my nursery, and following a storm, it now leans to one side like a fruit-tree version of the Tower of Pisa.

Apples can live for over 200 years and as this one is barely 15, it begs the question why a tree in its first flush of youth should start to fall over.

**"It now leans like the Tower of Pisa"**

Could it be that a subterranean rot such as phytophthora is at work, causing the roots to give up their hold on mother earth?

Or have the roots been killed by compaction – so often caused when cars are parked beneath the canopy?

Both are possibilities although my guess is that the tree has never established strong roots because it was mollycoddled by being staked for too long.

If supported for more than two years,

trees are slow to stand on their own feet.

Also, instead of a 3–6.5ft (1–2m) grass exclusion zone that young trees need, water and nutrient-robbing turf has been left to grow up to the trunk, weakening the roots. No wonder they lost their grip in the gales.

The bigger issue though, is what to do when such a tree takes a tumble? As a rule, if a trunk is easy to push back into place, chances are the roots are so damaged and fractured they won't survive and the tree is best pulled out.

If it's difficult to push upright, the roots

are still strong but have simply slipped in the soil to the wrong place.

That's the case with this apple, so I've come to its rescue, driving three hefty wooden stakes in at its front as props for the leaning branches, and I've added another at the back to anchor the tree from behind.

It might look like it's walking with a Zimmer frame and lost some of its balance and beauty, but it's stable and with some TLC there's every chance it'll be back and as bountiful as ever.

Fingers crossed!

## Toby's top tips



■ If a tree or shrub starts to lean, trim out at least a third of the canopy to compensate for the loss of roots. Then stake it to help prevent wind-rock.



■ Remove grass around the base of establishing trees and mulch to keep weeds down, which helps roots thrive.

Job  
of the  
week

## Give roots a boost

Now is the time to sprinkle root-boosting bone-meal around the base of trees, shrubs and roses. Applied now, the feed has time to work its way down to the roots so it's there for when plants need it during the rush of spring. Scatter roughly a gloved handful over every square meter of soil and lightly rake it in.







Tomato Gigantomo F1

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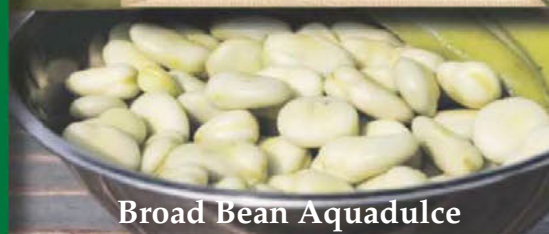
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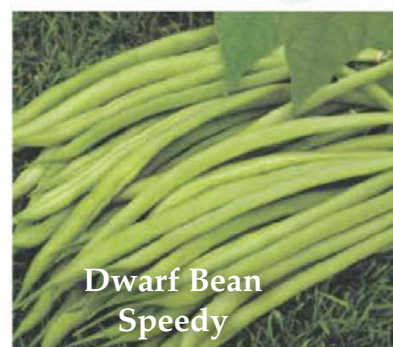
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